

EXPERIENCE RENEWAL OF THE MIND AND TRANSFORMATION  
OF BEHAVIOR THROUGH THE SPIRITUAL PRACTICE  
*OF LECTIO DIVINA*

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **EXPERIENCE RENEWAL OF THE MIND AND TRANSFORMATION OF BEHAVIOR THROUGH THE SPIRITUAL PRACTICE OF *LECTIO DIVINA***

by

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The purpose of this project is to help women identify the connection between internal thought patterns and external behaviors, to gain freedom from their thoughts and behaviors in conflict with Scripture, by renewing their minds through the spiritual process of *lectio divina*, the “divine reading of Scripture.” Eight women participated in an eight-week study that included lecture, discussion, prayer, and corporate and home practice of *lectio divina*. Pre/post interviews, Pre/post surveys, and journaling validated the qualitative case studies. Results indicate that participants did experience some transformation of thought patterns and behaviors through the practice of *lectio divina*.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

I would like to acknowledge my Lord and Savior, for nudging me to take a step of faith and apply to this doctorate program. “Dear Lord, you are everything to me. You are incredibly AWESOME, MAGNIFICENT, and AMAZING as you have guided every single one of my footsteps! You opened doors and made things happen that continue to surprise me. I am thankful to serve you, be your friend and daughter, but mostly, I am so extremely excited to fulfill all the plans you have prepared for me to do for Your Kingdom! May you be glorified in this project, for its purpose, and in everything you lead me to do.”

I would also like to acknowledge my husband, Ray, who has been an unwavering support to the call of God on my life. I am sincerely grateful for all the time, money, and prayers that you have continually and graciously poured out to me. You are a true example of faithfulness and commitment, not only as a follower of Christ, but also as a husband and loving father. God was so good to us when He put us together that day at your grandpa’s church; the place where we met, you proposed, and we married. He knew what He was doing. My love to you always!

Thank you, mentors, for all your help and guidance: Dr. Maureen Collins, Dr. Harold Hudson, and Dr. Stephen Swisher. Thank you Kenneth and Gloria Copeland, and Kellie Copeland Swisher for all the love you have shown to me. I have learned by your example what it is like to love like Jesus loves.

Thank you to my spiritual formation director, Dr. Jay Taylor, from the Assembly of God Theological Seminary, who provided support and voiced confidence in me when I was completing my master's degree and feeling pressure about being a "minister" of the Gospel. This project is a result of the spiritual retreat to the monastery that you directed me toward while I was in seminary.

Thank you to my editor, Amy Wescott, who has undergirded me, encouraged me, and provided a polished document. Your love, prayers, and support go beyond words!

Thank you to Shirley Schmidt who has consistently shown love and kindness to me and my family. I appreciate all those times you went out of your way to help with my children and prayed and believed with me to overcome any obstacles. Thank you for supporting and encouraging me to fulfill the plans God has for me.

And finally, to my mom and dad who blessed me with a wonderful foundation of love and stability in the home. You have demonstrated to me what it is like to stay married for 49 years and remain faithful. You are the best Nana and Papa in this world! Thank you for all your blessings.

## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my children: Logan, 20; Alexa, 18; Nathan, 11; and Lydia, 9 who I believe in and hope for the very best. May each one of you remember to trust The Lord. He promises He will never leave you, nor never forsake you. Follow the nudges He gives you, and He will work through you to do amazing things. Let go of your plans and follow God's plan for your life, and He will surprise you with His wonders, for with Him, "nothing is impossible."

I would also like to dedicate this document to my father, Benny Miller, who went to heaven on April 20, 2014, Resurrection Sunday (Easter), just before my doctoral graduation. Thank you for communicating to me to embrace challenges with persistence, dedication, and determination. You taught me the importance of higher education, and you always said, "Hard work pays off." I plan to use that principle to help increase the Kingdom of God, and bring the good news of the gospel to those who need it. Thank you for consistently displaying through yourself what love lives like, the kind of love that is explained in 1 Corinthians 13: patience, kindness, goodness. I am a better person because of you and I am comforted knowing you are in perfect peace. I already miss you and I am looking forward to spending time with you, for eternity!

This project is about stepping out in faith when God asks you to do something, and then trusting Him to fulfill what He has asked you to do.

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

ESV	English Standard Version
NIV	New International Version
NLT	New Living Translation
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
RSV	Revised Standard Version

## **EPIGRAPH**

**2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.**

**Romans 12:2**

**3 You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.**

**Isaiah 26:3**

## INTRODUCTION

Throughout my journey as a minister of the gospel, I have encountered countless women who regularly entertained negative or untrue thoughts, struggled with misbehaviors, and remained defeated in many areas of their lives. I have been one of these women. But, I have also experienced transformation of thought and behavior, and the inevitable freedom and peace that results. I began to reflect on the changes that I made in my life that spurred this transformation—recognizing my struggle, acknowledging my need for deliverance, accepting the love and grace of God who desired to help me, and adding spiritual disciplines that centered my focus on God into my daily practice. I believe that most Christians desire to find freedom from their areas of struggle, but many do not know how to release the transformative work of Christ in their lives.

While on a spiritual retreat at a monastery, I learned how to participate in *lectio divina*, one of the most powerful spiritual disciplines I have ever practiced in terms of its ability to align my thoughts and, subsequently, my behavior toward Christ-likeness. *Lectio divina* is a spiritual practice that combines meditation on the Word of God and prayer as a means of aligning the mind toward the truth of Scripture. Scripture in both the Old Testament (OT) and New Testament (NT) indicates that God-like character, or living according to the Spirit, results from submitting one's mind to God through the study of his Word.

The prophet Isaiah exhorts us to keep our mind focused on God: “You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you,” so that we may live in peace, free from that bondage of sinful behavior (Isa. 26:3).<sup>1</sup> In Romans 12:2, Paul also expresses the ability to find freedom from our flesh by renewing our minds: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what the will of God is, acceptable and perfect.”

When I first encountered the practice of *lectio divina*, I was struggling with controlling my thoughts and not controlling my words. Because of this, I lacked peace, and I knew I needed to change. I began following the steps in *lectio divina* to try to help overcome those hindrances. Every night I also began to journal my thoughts, as well as the words I had chosen to say throughout the day. I began meditating on Scripture that pertained to my thoughts and words, quoted Scripture daily, and wrote those Scriptures on several pieces of paper, placing them on my mirror in the bathroom, taking them with me in the car, and praying them out loud over and over. I began proclaiming that “my thoughts were captive to Christ,” that “I had the mind of Christ,” and that my words would bring life to those who listen because “life and death are in the power of the tongue” (2 Cor. 10:5; 1 Cor. 2:16; and Prov. 18:21).

After a few months of practicing the steps in *lectio divina*, I realized that I had gained freedom in both areas where I had struggled. My thoughts became filled with Scripture, and I, by the power of the Holy Spirit, was controlling my words by thinking about what I would say before I would say it. Since both those areas changed, my intimacy with the Lord increased, and I felt much more at peace with myself and others.

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<sup>1</sup>All Scripture is quoted from the English Standard Version (ESV), unless otherwise noted.

In Genesis 3 man fell to temptation, and all humans thereafter experience a struggle between their flesh and spirits (Rom. 8) that causes them to act contrary to God's will. Often, individuals ponder thoughts that are misaligned with Scripture. Eventually, those thoughts produce attitudes and behaviors that bring pain to people and their relationships.

However, God gave us a way to change and transform, the Word and the Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup> The Word of God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, is the link God chose for humans to be transformed into the likeness of Christ. According to 2 Timothy 3:16-17: "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." Reading, meditating, and praying the Word of God will enable us to be transformed so that we may accomplish all that God has purposed us to do.

In 2 Corinthians 3:18 the work of the Holy Spirit highlights our transformation: "We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit." Reading the Word of God, while allowing the Holy Spirit to speak to us, reveals the true meditations of our minds and hearts. Hebrews 4:12 says, "For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." Allowing the Spirit to reveal whether our inward thoughts are aligned with the

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<sup>2</sup>It is God's will for everyone to live with "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23).

Scripture we are reading is foundational to our ability to be transformed into Christ-likeness.

Once the Word uncovers any misalignments in our thinking or behavior, James warns us to “be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (James 1:22). We are to allow the Word to change us. Paul explained this to the Thessalonians, “. . . when you received the Word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the Word of God, which is at work in you believers” (1 Thess. 2:13).

Since I have begun working on this doctoral project, God has further enlightened me to the almost-epidemic need for women to gain freedom from internal struggle with thought patterns that are in conflict with what the Bible teaches about God, others, or themselves, and whose words and/or actions are reflective of this internal conflict. Outward behavior is the result of what we really believe. If a woman’s inward thoughts do no align with the truth of God’s word, then her external behaviors will most likely reflect that distortion. This misalignment yields a lack of intimacy with God, as well as attitudes and actions that bring struggle to her and/or others. Women who live in this context are unable to experience the freedom for which Christ came to set us free (Gal. 5:1).

The proposed treatment hypothesis for this project was that women would experience a deeper intimacy with God and gain freedom from specific thought patterns that are in conflict with Scriptural teaching, as well as the subsequent behaviors that are reflective of this internal conflict, by the renewal of their minds through the spiritual

practice of *lectio divina*. The project consisted of eight weeks of sessions that lasted one and one half hour each.

Each session was comprised of well-developed lessons from Scripture about the mind and how our thoughts impact our behavior, as well as what Scripture teaches about how the mind can be transformed through meditating on the Word of God by the power of the Holy Spirit. The spiritual practice of *lectio divina* was taught as a systematized way to approach the Word of God that enables transformation of the mind and freedom from any subsequent behaviors that prevent women from living in accordance with God's image and will for their lives.

During the first session, the participants were given a pre-test and a one-on-one entrance interview to gain an understanding of each participant's struggles and current level of participation in Scripture meditation and/or other spiritual disciplines. Participants also chose a specific area of personal struggle that was identified both by recognition of an internal thought pattern that is opposed to the truth of Scripture and outward behaviors that are reflective of this conflict.

Over the course of the following weeks, each woman was assigned, and also personally selected, Scriptures that addressed her specific area of concern to use in the spiritual practice of *lectio divina* with the expectation that her mind will begin to transform and her behaviors will change. Participant journaling was incorporated regularly to identify changes in areas of struggle and reflection about the practice of *lectio divina*. Each participant took a post-test survey and an exit interview to identify changes in her area of struggle and to test ideas about practicing *lectio divina* and the impact of the overall project.

This dissertation includes six chapters. Chapter One describes my spiritual pilgrimage and background. It also describes my context of ministry and how those two combined bring the synergy to this project.

Chapter Two is a portrayal of the model of ministry for this project. Additionally, it includes a review of current literature related to the model of ministry and to the practice of *lectio divina* in modern society.

Chapter Three includes the biblical, historical, and theological foundations for the model of ministry. The goal is to examine how transformation of the human mind and behavior has been viewed from a spiritual and philosophical perspective. The research also points to *lectio divina* as the method by which this transformation can occur.

Chapter Four describes the research methodology and design for the project. It describes how and why the design was developed. Included are the methods of data collection and analysis, as well as the validation of outcomes.

Chapter Five offers information about the research field experience. Included is the implementation, research outcomes, and analysis of data.

Chapter Six provides my reflections of the success of the field experience. Included are summarization of outcomes, conclusions of implementation of this model of ministry, and recommendations for future research.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **MINISTRY FOCUS**

This chapter provides insight into my personal motivation for the model and method of ministry for this project. This chapter describes my spiritual pilgrimage which developed in me an understanding of the importance of meditation on Scripture as the basis for the transformation of thought and behavior toward Christ-likeness. Additionally, this chapter describes my current context of ministry.

#### **Spiritual Pilgrimage**

The Lord orchestrates our upbringings and experiences to prepare us for the work He has called each of us to accomplish during our time on earth. As I consider my own family background, experiences within the Church, and areas of personal transformation through the study of His Word, I can see how God has prepared me to minister to women from diverse backgrounds and experiences.

During my childhood, I grew up in a multi-ethnic family where my mother and father adopted three children. I was the middle white child, and only daughter, with an older white brother and a younger mixed African American/Indian brother. From this experience, I saw firsthand the pain of racial discrimination and purposed to love and value every person, regardless of race or background.

Early in life, I felt a strong desire to follow and embrace God with all my heart. Although I grew up with parents who instilled the Roman Catholic tradition in our home, I found myself attending Christian churches from various denominations, and non-denominations. I was searching for deep intimacy with God, but never felt completely satisfied.

During my twenties, I experienced many challenges as a single mother of two young children after a dissolved marriage. It was during this time that I struggled with self-identity, wanting acceptance and approval from others, and believing that God was for me, not against me. I began attending a church that focused on the empowerment of Scripture and its transformational value. My Sunday School teacher taught Scripture that focused on our identity being in Christ and how much God loves and values every person. As I began to meditate daily on these Scriptures, I experienced a transformation in my mind. I began to understand that my identity and value are in Christ rather than in anything external.

Looking back, two Scriptures helped change and transform me. John 12:43 explains that the Pharisees loved human praise rather than praise from God: “For they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God,” and 1 Thessalonians 2:4: “But just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.” After meditation on those verses, God helped me understand that I should live to please Him alone. Those Scriptures helped me to begin to live free from the burden of making decisions based on what I thought others wanted from me, but instead, making decisions based on the direction and guidance of the Lord.

The Lord nudged me to go back to college to complete a bachelor's degree in education and to pursue a teaching career. Though I knew that this was what the Lord was directing, it was difficult to see how I was going to be able to do it. I clung to God's promise that "He will never leave us nor forsake us" (Deut. 31:6), and as I meditated on this truth, I became certain that He would carry me through. The challenges I faced—finding childcare for my two young children, making enough money for food and gas, and having enough physical and mental strength to juggle it all—forced me to rely on and trust God more than I ever had before. I began meditating on Scriptures that command believers to trust in God, who is trustworthy.

Over and over, I had the opportunity to act on what I said I believed—that if I trusted God with all my heart, leaning not on my own understanding, but acknowledging Him in all my ways, He would direct my footsteps (Pr. 3:5-6). At one point, I had exhausted all my resources to purchase food for my children and me to eat. I cried out to God in desperation, asking Him to provide. Within two hours, I received a phone call from a friend who said that she had me on her mind and that she would like to take us grocery shopping. The way God demonstrated His trustworthiness in such a tangible way made it easier for me to trust Him the next time I felt uncertain about which next step to take.

After several years of teaching elementary school, I met and married my husband, and our family grew from two to four children. In the local church we attended, the Lord led me to a leadership position where for several years I worked as the women's director. Through my work, I discovered that God gave me a gift to teach and preach the Word of God. I learned that it is by using these gifts that I feel the most satisfaction in life.

However, when I began teaching women the Word of God, I struggled with the realization that I lacked much Scriptural knowledge. I had been meditating on 2 Timothy 2:15: “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.” As I sought the Lord’s guidance, my husband suggested I go to seminary to deepen my understanding of the Word, and to receive further training to teach it to others. After praying diligently for about a year, I felt God’s direction to apply and began my degree, a Master of Art in Theological Studies (MATS), which I completed over the next four years.

During my training at the seminary, the spiritual director led a group of students to a monastery, *The Assumption Abbey*. The monks at this monastery host spiritual retreats that are open to anyone. As part of our retreat, a monk taught our group how to encounter God on a deeper level through the spiritual practice of *lectio divina*. *Lectio divina* helped me remember the Scripture I was meditating on and provided a way for me to pray the Word more fervently. During this practice, I felt extremely touched by God. I especially liked *lectio divina*’s focus on slowing down and taking time to seek God and rest in His presence. After our retreat, I wanted to share with others about *lectio divina* because of the way it touches lives through the empowerment of the Word of God and allows individuals to deepen their intimacy with God.

I began to understand God’s plan and purpose for my life involved ministering to women through the training I received during a master’s program, and also as a women’s director in a church. In addition, I realized that God has empowered me to lead women to reach their fullest potential. This involves leading women to find freedom through God’s

Word, encouraging them to experience the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, and helping them to discover the gifts God has given them.

### **The Context of Ministry**

The Lord challenged me once again when He nudged my husband and me to move to Branson, Missouri, where God led me to teach a small group women's Bible study in my neighborhood. Although I had taught women the Word of God prior to moving, it was during these small group Bible studies in Branson where God made me even more aware of how powerful His Word is to transform. Many women who attended made comments about how they were changed and empowered by the Word of God. Shortly thereafter, God nudged me to apply for a doctorate in ministry to complete my education.

Since I have begun working on this doctoral project, God has opened my eyes to the pressing need for women to gain freedom from areas of consistent struggle, and He has given me a vision to help meet those needs. Currently, God has opened a door for me to begin a radio ministry. My local Christian radio station allots five minutes, Monday through Friday, for my broadcast. During this time, I preach the Word of God, describe personal life experiences, and challenge those listening to make behavioral changes. In addition, I post my radio messages on my website so that listeners can have access to all previous messages. Since my teaching of *lectio divina* for this project, I plan to include a section on my website describing the practice of *lectio divina*, as well as list daily Scriptures women can use to engage in this practice, which can bring about a renewed mind and a transformed life.

Additionally, God has given me a desire to own and operate a women's ministry building in the future. The city of Branson is a unique and dynamic tourist market that would be an opportune place to minister to not only local women, but also the women who visit each year. This ministry building would facilitate meeting women's unique needs and would also serve as a resource center where women could obtain a variety of outstanding books, CDs, DVDs, and other media to help them grow spiritually. This place of ministry could provide a forum for a variety of female teachers to minister to women on a regular basis. *Lectio divina* would also be incorporated with teaching and ample resources available to enhance the understanding and implementation on this topic. Women who come to the center could be ministered to not only corporately, but could also spend time in specially designed spaces where they could pray, seek God, and study God's word. I also envision God bringing together a team of some of Branson's Christian musicians who could inspire and enlighten women through worship music.

Helping women to draw closer to God and to find freedom from any bondages and hindrances brings me more joy than my words could explain. God has given me the desire to point women to Christ who brings good news to the poor, binds up the broken hearted, proclaims liberty to the captives, and helps those who are bound be set free. I know and understand the needs of women, and I feel that God has birthed within me the desire to reach out to those who need it. In my past, God has placed in my pathway many different women who have helped me gain understanding in God's Word, prayed and believed with me for whatever I needed, and loved me unconditionally. I know other women need this as well, and I believe that is why God has led me to this project. I desire to teach and encourage women in the spiritual practice of *lectio divina* so that they will

experience a deep intimacy with God that will transform their minds and behaviors to reflect Christ, a change that will not only alter their own lives, but the lives of those they interact with on a daily basis.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE STATE OF THE ART IN THIS MINISTRY MODEL

This chapter contains a review of various writings that helped influence the development of the ministry model for this project. The review is included to demonstrate the applicability of my model and method, as well as to indicate my understanding of the research that has been conducted on how the transformation of thought and behavior occurs from both a spiritual and physiological perspective. First, I will portray my model of ministry. Then, I will focus on the contemporary application of my method.

#### **The Model of Ministry**

The model of ministry for this project is transformative with *lectio divina*, the divine reading of Scripture,<sup>1</sup> as the proposed method by which the transformation<sup>2</sup> of thought (renewal of the mind) and behavior occurs. An internal struggle with thought patterns that are in conflict with what the Bible teaches about God, others, or oneself yields external behaviors that reflect that distortion. This misalignment produces a lack of intimacy with God, as well as attitudes and actions that bring struggle to oneself and

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<sup>1</sup>*Lectio* is Latin for “a reading.” *Divina* is Latin for “holy” or “divine.”

<sup>2</sup>Transformation/transform will be used interchangeably with change(s) where individuals move in their thoughts, attitudes, and/or behaviors toward becoming more like Christ, who was righteous and holy in all regards.

others, and inhibits one to experience the freedom for which Christ came to set us free (Gal. 5:1).

### **Transformation of the Mind**

Romans 12:2 says, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will.” The way to know and live God’s will, as opposed to conforming to the patterns of the world, is to apply the Word of God to every aspect of our being, beginning with the mind. The Word is God’s message to humanity and has the capability to renew and transform the minds of those who read it.

In *Habits of the Mind: Ten Exercises to Renew Your Thinking*, Dr. Archibald Hart, a psychotherapist, points out, “you are what you think” (Prov. 23:7). He explains his understanding of the power of one’s thoughts on his or her behavior:

Thought always comes before feeling and action. . . . If you want to influence how you feel or how you behave, you must first pay attention to how you think. . . . Many unhappy people complain about their miserable feelings without realizing that they can change those feelings through healthier thinking. It is our duty to know the mind of Christ, with His help, to emulate it.<sup>3</sup>

Hart explains that taking the time and trouble to seek the mind of Christ is characteristic of every great leader in the Christian realm.<sup>4</sup> He points to chapter two of Philippians to define the mind of Christ that is sought by dedicated believers: (a) a loving mind (“having the same love”), v. 2; (b) a godly mind (“equal with God”), v. 6; (c) a servant’s mind (“the form of a servant”), v. 7; (d) a humble mind (“he humbled himself”),

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<sup>3</sup>Archibald D. Hart, *Habits of the Mind: Ten Exercises to Renew Your Thinking* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1996), 8.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 146.

v. 8; (e) an obedient mind (“and become obedient unto death”), v. 8, (f) an exalted mind (“God also hath highly exalted him”), v. 9.<sup>5</sup>

The implication is that because these great Christian leaders, who “steeped themselves in Scripture, studied it, and prayed about it until His Word was carved into their minds . . . directing their own stream of thought until there was simply nowhere else for it to go,”<sup>6</sup> allowed the Word to permeate their minds, their actions subsequently reflected the mind of Christ and significantly impacted the world around them. Hart holds that the same impact is possible today for believers who choose to renew their minds.<sup>7</sup>

Mulholland agrees that changes in behavior begin with a transformation of mind and explains the relationship as the difference between being and doing, which are the two components that make up who we are:

Jesus’ Great Commandment puts being and doing in their true relationship. Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was, and he said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30, RSV). Jesus is giving us several different insights here, all of which have to do with the relationship between being and doing.<sup>8</sup>

Mulholland explains it is your lifestyle, or your actions, that are “the outer manifestation in the world of who you are, in your relationships with others and in your interactions with the events and circumstances of your life.”<sup>9</sup> We express our love for God by doing

<sup>5</sup>Hart, 146-147.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>M. Robert Mulholland, *Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation* (Nashville, TN: The Upper Room, 1985), 95-97.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 98.

what those who love God should do.<sup>10</sup> Then our being overflows to our doing.<sup>11</sup> As our being conforms to the image of Christ, described in the Word of God, our doing also changes.

Philippians 4:8 instructs believers to focus their thoughts on “ . . . whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable” and “if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.” Certainly, that which is perfectly “true”, “noble”, “right”, “pure”, “lovely”, and “admirable” is the Word of God, Christ Himself. The practice of thinking on the Word should be primary in the life of the believer and should precede the expectation of behavioral transformation.

Believers should approach thinking on the Word expectantly, trusting the power of the Holy Spirit to use it to transform the mind and, eventually, to develop Christ-like behavior. In *Soul Feast*, Marjorie Thompson says,

It is the attitude we bring to spiritual reading that allows God to transform the text from interesting words to words with the power to change our very being. That attitude is an expectation that we will, through the words we read, be encountered by the loving presence and radical challenge of the living God. That attitude is a willingness to be addressed, discerned, and penetrated by the tender but decisive power of the Holy Spirit. That attitude is a desire to respond fully and freely to what is heard, so that God may restore to us the wholeness of our life in Christ—the divine image obscured in our depths, yet even now being called into the light of day to reveal the glory of the children of God!<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Mulholland, 98.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 100.

<sup>12</sup>Marjorie J. Thompson, *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2005), 31.

The Scriptural command to be transformed by the renewing of your mind is not merely a spiritual process, but a physiological one as well. Recent studies in neuroscience have offered evidence that supports that the brain physically changes when it is engaged in the exercise of meditating. In *Real Happiness: The Power of Meditation*, Sharon Salzberg attests that the human brain is a learning machine that translates what is focused on (thoughts) into correlating outcomes. Salzberg links physical and emotional well-being to meditative practices, which have the capability to affect brain function and structure by changing it. These changes may affect physical and emotional health for the better, or worse, depending on what is meditated upon.<sup>13</sup>

In terms of impact on physical and emotional health, whether or not what is meditated upon is objectively true is not the primary issue. Salzberg asserts that while one's starting thought may be an objective truth, the tendency is to alter that truth by imposing various add-ons that influence one's perception, and therefore, influence the focus of one's meditation on that experiential truth. Salzberg encourages the practice of mindfulness as a means of ensuring that these add-ons do not contribute to thoughts, emotions, and behaviors that are inconsistent with the objective truth<sup>14</sup>:

Mindfulness, also called wise attention, helps us see what we're adding to our experiences, not only during meditation sessions but also elsewhere. These add-ons might take the form of projecting into the future (*my neck hurts, so I'll be miserable forever*), foregone conclusions (*there's no point in asking for a raise*), rigid concepts (*you're either for me or against me*), unexamined habits (you feel tense and reach for a cookie) or associative thinking (you snap at your daughter and then leap to your own childhood problems and then on to deciding you're just like your mom) . . . we want to see clearly what we're doing as we're doing it, to

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<sup>13</sup>Sharon Salzberg, *Real Happiness: The Power of Meditation, a 28-Day Program* (New York, NY: Workman Publishing, 2011), 28, 78.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 78.

be able to distinguish our direct experience from the add-ons, and to know that we can choose whether to heed them or not.<sup>15</sup>

Believers certainly are not immune to adding on to the objective truth of Scripture, which inhibits their transformation. Being aware of these potential add-ons, and choosing to disregard them when they are ill-informed, is vital for a believer to experience a renewed mind. The believer must know, however, that their transformation is not solely dependent on their own efforts, but also through their reliance on the Holy Spirit to transform them from the inside out.

Meditating on the objective truth of Scripture, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, transforms the mind of the believer by aligning his or her stories to the truth of who God is, how He relates to His people, and how He desires His people to relate to one another. The nature of these stories, according to Lisa Wimberger in *New Beliefs, New Brain*, changes the makeup of the brain:

Our experience acts as the catalyst for the brain's ability to change. . . . Science has discovered that the experience need not be anything more than a perception, story, or belief. When the prefrontal cortex perceives it's in control based on the story we're telling it—those stories begin to sculpt our mind-scape. The stories one creates subconsciously imbue those stories with details and emotional content, they become marked in our brains by dedicated neural pathways and networks . . .<sup>16</sup>

These neural pathways and networks are not only created by the stories one repeats (interpretation of one's experience), but they are also determinative of future thought patterns and perceptions, which lead to correlating behavior. For the believer, the importance of interpreting experiences based on objective Scriptural truth is clear.

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<sup>15</sup>Salzberg, 78-79.

<sup>16</sup>Lisa Wimberger, *New Beliefs, New Brain: Free Yourself from Stress and Fear* (Studio City, CA: Divine Arts, 2012), 33.

Current thinking that is aligned with the truth of Scripture leads to future thinking that is aligned with Scripture, which leads to transformed, Christ-like behavior.

Dr. Caroline Leaf, a Christian neuroscientist, explains what happens from a physiological perspective when one's thoughts, including destructive words and stories, enter the brain:

Toxic thoughts are thoughts that trigger negative and anxious emotions, which produce biochemicals that cause the body stress. They are stored in your mind, as well as in the cells of your body. . . . The surprising truth is that every single thought—whether it is positive or negative—goes through the same cycle when it forms. Thoughts are basically electrical impulses, chemicals and neurons. They look like trees with branches. As the thoughts grow and become permanent, more branches grow and the connections become stronger.<sup>17</sup>

According to Leaf, meditating upon these toxic thoughts increases their biochemical strength which increases one's tendency toward poor behavior, illnesses, and self-defeating choices. Leaf explains that the mind and body are inherently linked: "We have two choices: we can let our thoughts become toxic and poisonous, or we can detox our negative thoughts, which will improve our emotional wholeness and even recover our physical health."<sup>18</sup>

Aligning one's thoughts with the Word of God—renewing the mind—is the key, from both a physiological and spiritual perspective, to transform future thinking and behavior. Deuteronomy 30:19 says, "Today I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings and curses. Now I call on heaven and earth to witness the choice you make. Oh, that you would choose life, so that you and your descendants might live!" (NLT). From the earliest biblical accounts to today, God's people have been given the

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<sup>17</sup>Caroline Leaf, *Who Switched Off My Brain? Controlling Toxic Thoughts and Emotions* (Southlake, TX: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2009), 19.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 21.

freedom to choose life—adherence to the Word by the power of the Holy Spirit—or death—a rejection of it in favor of self-reliance. Though aligning oneself to the Word is not a guarantee of a life of ease, it is assurance of transformation toward the likeness of Christ.

### **The Practice of *Lectio Divina***

*Lectio divina* is a spiritual discipline that allows individuals to experience transformation of thought and behavior through meditative reading and contemplation of the Word, which conforms believers to the mind of Christ and develops in them Christ-like characteristics (Phil. 2:5 and 1 Corin. 2:16).<sup>19</sup> Reuben Job explains,

The transforming power of God is available to every Christian. But the transformed life does not come by accident or by chance. To be formed in Christ and to have Christ formed within us is clearly a gift of God. And yet, there are requirements made of us if we are to receive the gift of transformation.<sup>20</sup>

Recognizing their continual need for transformation of thought and behavior, individuals have responded by engaging in systematic practices that have helped them conform to the image of Christ. *Lectio divina* is one such practice that believers have employed for

<sup>19</sup>Christ-like characteristics can be defined as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, self-control, forgiveness, humility, fairness, courageousness, friendliness, honesty, truthfulness, dependability, gratitude, responsibility, contentment, generosity, purity, holiness, confidence, encouragement, availability, attentiveness, wisdom, compassion, enthusiasm, initiative, diligence, thoughtfulness, efficiency, being discreet, optimistic, obedient, reverent, agreeable, appreciative, anger-free, good example, childlikeness, commitment, communicative, cooperative, creative, diligent, dependable, determined, showing deference, devotion, discernment, disciplined, decisive, slander/swear-free, endurance, fearless, flexible, graceful, seeks guidance, harmless, honest, hospitable, integrity, loyalty, meekness, merciful, perseverance, persuasiveness, prompt, prudent, purposed, respectful, secure, submissive, self-acceptance, selflessness, sensitivity, servant-leader, sincere, success, supportive, tactful, teachable, temperate, tolerant, thoroughness, understanding, virtue, and zealous. Note that these characteristics come from a lecture by Stephen Pratt, “To Ourselves and Our Posterity,” *Seek This Jesus Blog*, entry posted on December 25, 2009, <http://seekthisjesus.com/60-character-traits-of-christ/> (accessed December 27, 2013).

<sup>20</sup>Rueben P. Job, foreword to *Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation*, by M. Robert Mulholland (Nashville, TN: The Upper Room, 1985), 11.

centuries because of its effectiveness in helping them find freedom from the thought patterns and corresponding behaviors that do not align with the teaching of Scripture.

*Lectio divina* includes prayerful meditation on passages of Scripture, the living Word, with the expectation that God will speak to the reader in a personally instructive way.<sup>21</sup>

*Lectio divina* involves silently meditating on short passages of Scripture with the expectation that God will speak to the participant through the Holy Spirit in a transformative way.<sup>22</sup> In this practice, the Word of God is acknowledged as the living Word taken very literally (John 1:1). This model is intended to promote communion with God and to increase the knowledge of God's Word. It is, in the words of Brother Lawrence, "practicing being in the presence of God."<sup>23</sup>

*Lectio Divina* is generally comprised of four movements—*lectio* (reading the Word of God), *meditatio* (meditation), *oratio* (praying), and *contemplatio* (contemplation).<sup>24</sup>

### *Read the Word of God.*

In order for *lectio divina* to be effective, the believer should have a plan for reading the Word of God, such as reading short portions of Scripture—three to fifteen

<sup>21</sup>Stephen J. Binz, *Conversing with God in Scripture: A Contemporary Approach to Lectio Divina* (Ijamsville, MD: The Word Among Us, 2008), 28.

<sup>22</sup>Jesus points out in each of the first three Gospels that the Word of God is about listening to the Spirit: "Let anyone with ears to hear listen!" (Matt. 13:3-9; Mark 4:3-9; Luke 8:5-8). The Spirit revealed to John: "Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches" (Rev. 2:7-29; 3:6-22).

<sup>23</sup>See Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God* (New York, NY: Alba House, 1997). Brother Lawrence was a 17<sup>th</sup> century French monk who delighted being in God's presence, and also taught spiritual principles.

<sup>24</sup>Luke Dysinger, "Lectio Divina," in *The Oblate Life*, ed. Gervase Holdaway (Collegeville, MI: Liturgical Press, 2008), 109-112.

verses—in one setting. Finding a place to read where one can regularly be alone, quiet, and faced with no distractions will produce the right spirit and frame of mind for optimal learning. Additionally, oral reading enhances learning and remembrance of the passages of Scripture, so believers are advised to read the passage aloud at least twice.

The participant engages the intellect and reflects upon the verses for one to three minutes by looking at the context of the passage. Then, he or she identifies the literal sense by asking the questions: who, what, where, why, and when did this take place. Many participants find it helpful to use a study Bible to look at notes or a commentary to help enlighten the meaning of the passage. Deciding the genre of the passage is also beneficial. For instance, is it a parable (a story to illustrate a point), a historical narrative (a real-life event), or a poem.<sup>25</sup> As believers interact with the living and active Word of God, their lives are uniquely touched by God who reveals His divine wisdom to those who listen while reading it.

### *Meditate.*

Participants read the Scripture out loud for the second time. For one to three minutes the meaning of the Scripture is reflected upon with an active mind. This involves engaging the heart and asking the questions, “What about and how does this passage of Scripture relate to me personally?” and also using the imagination to place oneself into the text. This involves allowing personal experiences, memories, thoughts, feelings, hopes, and desires to be integrated as the passage is reflected upon. This allows for the spiritual sense of the Scripture to be engaged.

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<sup>25</sup>Father John Paul, Interview by author, Saint Joseph’s Friary, New York, NY, October 12, 2012.

The practice of meditating on Scripture as a means of transforming the mind and behavior has been advised since biblical times. The word meditate appears about fifteen times in the OT. In Joshua 1:8, the Israelites were admonished to meditate: “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.”

The Hebrew word for meditate, *haga*, means to reflect upon. In *Christian Spirituality*, Cunningham and Egan assert,

For Jews *haga* was the recitation of the Word of God that made the law/word more fully present to the one who recited that word. The physical action of recitation facilitates the appropriation of the word. *Haga* is an appropriation of God’s message so that this message may be remembered, reflected upon and lived.<sup>26</sup>

The ancient Jews understood that in order to live according to the Word of God, they needed to spend time meditating upon it.

This meditation of *lectio divina* involves listening and pondering the words and the message being revealed. When the passage is read, it is advised not to try to assign a meaning to the Scripture at first, but to wait for the action of the Holy Spirit to illuminate the mind and inspire meaning for it.<sup>27</sup> According to Christine Valters Paintner, “Meditation is not a process of analyzing or thinking about the words of the text, but

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<sup>26</sup>Lawrence S. Cunningham and Keith J. Egan, *Christian Spirituality: Themes from the Tradition* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1996), 87.

<sup>27</sup>David G. Benner, *Opening to God: Lectio Divina and Life as Prayer* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 47-53.

rather a way of being with all that is stirred within you. It is the act of moving into relationship with the Scripture passage.”<sup>28</sup> Paintner says,

The focus of meditation is the heart—a heart receptive to God’s presence with us whatever may be happening. It is important to rest with God’s Word first since *being* comes before *doing*. Then we can hear what is emerging inside and allow it to unfold. Before we can figure out what God is saying and respond to it, we must still our minds and open our hearts to listen . . . Meditation gives us strength. It is a reservoir of wisdom to deal with life’s challenges. It helps us discern the ways God is calling us out into the world. But first, it invites us on a pilgrimage within, a journey deep into the heart . . . and be attuned to the Holy Spirit. . . . *Meditatio* is the process of allowing the Word to work within us and reflecting on what we have taken into the depths of our being.<sup>29</sup>

### *Pray.*

Participants read the Scripture out loud for the third time and respond to the passage of Scripture by opening the heart more deeply and asking the Lord to help apply this truth to their lives. The prayer may include petitioning God for whatever the heart desires; contrition; asking for forgiveness; healing; expressing help for to relieve pain, hurt, anger, and frustration; or perhaps engaging in a time of praise—appreciation of, gratitude for, and adoration of God.<sup>30</sup>

Prayer is two-way communication with God, which implies not only talking to Him, but also listening for a response. In the practice of *lectio divina*, the focus is to pray while engaging with the text of Scripture. Pope Benedict XVI emphasized the importance of directing prayers to God while reading the Word as a guiding light and a source of

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<sup>28</sup>Christine Valters Paintner, *Lectio Divina: Contemplative Awakening and Awareness* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 2008), 34.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 36.

<sup>30</sup>Father John Paul, Interview by author, Saint Joseph’s Friary, New York, NY, October 12, 2012.

direction.<sup>31</sup> Prayer time is the human response to the passage of Scripture being reflected upon.

*Contemplate.*

Participants read the Scripture out loud for the fourth time and then rest in the Lord. Contemplation is resting in God's presence during silent prayer and maintaining a focus on our love for and devotion to God. This is a time to reflect and recall the meaning of the Word of God, allowing it to move from reading, to indwelling within us. As we are touched by God from His Word, we respond by changing and transforming into the likeness of Christ.

Thomas Merton, a monk, is often associated with contemplation. He wrote a book called *Contemplative Prayer*. Within his book, he advocates being silent before God:

More than all things love silence; it brings you a fruit that tongue cannot describe. . . . Each will proceed according to his own faith and his own capacity. The climate of this prayer is . . . one of awareness, gratitude and a totally obedient love which seeks nothing but to please God . . .<sup>32</sup>

Merton establishes that contemplative prayer should be from the heart. He says, "It refers to the deepest psychological ground of one's personality, the inner sanctuary where self-awareness goes beyond analytical reflection and opens out into metaphysical and theological confrontation."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Benner, 39.

<sup>32</sup>Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York, NY: New Directions, 1972), 33.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

Father John Paul, a monk at Saint Joseph's Friary in New York City,<sup>34</sup> advocates using all five senses when engaging in the practice of *lectio divina*. This is a common practice among many who engage in *lectio divina*. Father Paul expressed that the more senses used, the easier Scripture will be remembered and the depth of the encounter with the Word will increase. Engaging the five senses means to *savor* (Latin “to know”) the Word—see, hear, touch, taste, and smell. Savoring literally means that participants will *see* Scripture with their eyes, *touch* Scripture by following along with their index finger or hold a page with their hands, and *hear* Scripture as the Word is read out loud. In a spiritual sense, participants will *taste* Scripture as in Psalm 119:103: “How sweet are your words to my *taste*, sweeter than honey to my mouth” and will *smell* Scripture as in 2 Corinthians 2:14-15: “We are the *aroma* of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other from life to life.” According to Paintner, “Savoring implies lingering with the experience...and enter[ing] into the sacred text and linger[ing] there for the full sense experience of what we are offered.”<sup>35</sup>

### ***Lectio Divina Today***

According to Stephen Binz, there is a renewed attraction to *lectio divina* today because of the increasing interest in the Bible among the people of God.<sup>36</sup> Binz extols the practice of *lectio divina* “as a way of praying [that] honors that most basic source of all

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<sup>34</sup>Father John Paul, Interview by author, Saint Joseph's Friary, New York, NY, October 12, 2012.

<sup>35</sup>Paintner, 82.

<sup>36</sup>Binz, 12.

real prayer—an interior desire for God. *Lectio divina* lets us understand that our desire for God is the result of God's initiative, the stirring of God's grace within us, drawing us and inviting to a deeper intimacy with him.<sup>37</sup> The purpose of *Lectio divina* is to allow the Word of God to *inform* and *transform* believers as they submit themselves to the process:<sup>38</sup>

The regular practice of *lectio divina* gradually creates a “biblical” person, whose mind and heart are saturated with the words, images, and memories of Scripture. But this process takes time, dedication, and persistence. Spasmodic bursts of devotion will not work. The more we understand and get to know God through our prayerful reading, the more we grow in love. Faithfulness to this communication with our divine Lover creates an ever-deepening intimacy with him. We come to know ourselves better, too, as we begin to see ourselves through the eyes of God. Gradually, *lectio divina* becomes a contemplative experience of love.<sup>39</sup>

Contemporary writer Eugene Peterson, the author of *The Message* Bible, also advocates practicing *lectio divina* on a regular basis. In *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading*, Peterson says,

*Lectio divina* is a way of reading the Scriptures that is congruent with the way the Scriptures serve the Christian community as a witness to God's revelation of Himself to us. It is the wise guidance developed through the centuries of devout Bible reading to discipline us, the readers of Scripture, into appropriate ways of understanding and receiving this text so that it is formative for the way we live our lives, not merely making an impression on our mind or feelings. It intends the reading of Scripture to be a permeation of our lives by the revelation of God.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Binz, 11.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 14.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 22.

<sup>40</sup>Eugene H. Peterson, *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 81.

*Lectio divina* cultivates a personal, participatory attentiveness and thus allows the Word of God to train us and change us.<sup>41</sup> Using the words of Jesus, Peterson insists, “‘Go and do . . .’ Live what you read. We read the Bible in order to *live* the Word of God.”<sup>42</sup> When believers participate with the Word of God, they are formed by it to become more like Christ in every aspect of daily living.<sup>43</sup>

In *Sanctuary of the Soul*, Richard Foster points out, “At any moment our minds are wallowing in the gutter of carnal desires. We feel fractured and fragmented . . . and more often than not we find ourselves ‘unhappy, uneasy, strained, oppressed and fearful.’”<sup>44</sup> These realities of the human condition are eased by the practice of *lectio divina*, which is a habitual orientation of one’s heart toward God that requires acknowledgment of the need for transformation.<sup>45</sup> Without even realizing it, as we enter into the presence of God through *lectio divina*, our heart takes on a new character. We take an “inward journey” and gone are the old impulses for manipulation, anger, fear, bitterness, gluttony, pride, lust, revenge, and substance abuses.<sup>46</sup> Before we are aware of it, we change and transform with new responses of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness,

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<sup>41</sup>Peterson, 84.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 59.

<sup>44</sup>Richard Foster, *Sanctuary of the Soul: Journey into Meditative Prayer* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 31.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 32.

<sup>46</sup>Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 1998), 3-4.

goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.<sup>47</sup> Participants of *lectio divina* become more resilient to any of life's difficulties.

Foster's contemporary, Dallas Willard, agrees. Foster and Willard are widely known to advocate "spiritual formation" in the life of the believer, a transformational process in which people seek movement in thought and behavior toward Christ-likeness. Willard asserts: "The process of spiritual formation in Christ is one of progressively replacing . . . destructive images and ideas with the images and ideas that filled the mind of Jesus Himself . . . Spiritual formation in Christ moves toward a total interchange of *our* ideas and images for *His*."<sup>48</sup> Though not identical in method, the spiritual formation process shares the goal of *lectio divina*, to engage in a process that transforms the mind and behavior of the believer.

In many circles, the term "contemplation" is associated with *lectio divina* because *lectio divina* is "deep contemplative reading, [where] the simple words on the page become clearer and more meaningful."<sup>49</sup> However, some contemporary contemplative experiences focus on *centering prayer*. Developed from a practice described in *The Cloud of Unknowing*,<sup>50</sup> centering prayer is a method of prayer that goes beyond conversation with Christ, to communion with Him.

Centering prayer involves trusting and resting in God, without thought or focus on anything. It is essentially a prayer of companionable silence. To practice centering

<sup>47</sup>Foster, "Celebration," 32. See also the fruits of the Spirit: Gal. 5:22-23.

<sup>48</sup>Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002), 101-102.

<sup>49</sup>The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, "Lectio Divina," <http://www.contemplativemind.org/practices/tree/lectiodivina> (accessed December 28, 2013).

<sup>50</sup>*The Cloud of Unknowing* is an anonymous fourteenth-century contemplative classic. This is available in a book: Evelyn Underhill, *The Cloud of Unknowing: The Classic of Medieval Mysticism*, ed. Bernard Bangley (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2003).

prayer, first select a word that is a symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within. Make this selection prayerfully. . . . Then, sitting comfortably and with your eyes closed, allow yourself to be in silence, resting in God. Whenever you notice your mind engaged with thoughts, gently introduce the sacred word to help you disengage from your thoughts. For some persons, instead of a sacred word, noticing one's breath or a simple inward glance toward the Divine Presence may be more suitable. Do not use your sacred word, breath, or sense of Presence as a focus point. Instead, use it as a small tool to help you disengage from—or drop beneath—the inevitable thoughts that fill our minds. . . . With regular practice you will begin to notice more peacefulness or clarity in how you react to life's events.<sup>51</sup>

Unlike *lectio divina*, however, contemplative prayer does not require use of Scripture as its basis for contemplation. Participants of this, and other meditative practices, must be certain that they are not focusing on anything that is contrary to God's Word. *Lectio divina*'s adherence to Scripture as the basis for the practice helps ensure that the participant is focusing on objective truth.

But despite the modern acceptance of *lectio divina* and other contemplative practices, some scholars completely disagree with their approach. Some call practicing *lectio divina* "mysticism," the belief that "direct knowledge of God, spiritual truth, or ultimate reality can be attained through subjective experience (intuition or insight)."<sup>52</sup> The Lighthouse Trails Research Project warns that *lectio divina* is a dangerous form of contemplative mystical prayer.<sup>53</sup> Bob DeWaay, in his article, *Richard Foster—Celebration of Deception*, claims that Foster's teaching to "journey inward" by receiving personal revelations from God is divination, unbiblical and dangerous because nowhere

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<sup>51</sup>Paintner, 65-66. Paintner uses quotes from a pamphlet, Thomas Keating, *The Method of Centering Prayer* (Butler, NJ: Contemplative Outreach, LTD., 2005), 1.

<sup>52</sup>Merriam-Webster Dictionary, online version, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mysticism> (accessed December 12, 2013).

<sup>53</sup>Lighthouse Trails Research Project, "Lectio Divina: What it is, What it is Not, and Why It is a Dangerous Practice," by Ken Silva. <http://www.lighthousetrailsresearch.com/lectiodivina.htm> (accessed December 28, 2013).

does the Bible describe an “inward journey to explore the realm of the spirit.”<sup>54</sup> DeWaay asserts,

God chose to reveal the truth about spiritual reality through His ordained, Spirit-inspired, biblical writers. What is spiritual and not revealed by God is of the occult and, therefore, forbidden. . . . The concept of *sola scriptura* is totally lost on mystics such as Richard Foster. They . . . believe they can gain valid and useful knowledge of spiritual things through direct, personal inspiration. . . . They look for spirituality through experimentation. . . . Foster wishes us to fill our minds with personal revelations from the spirit realm that we naively are to think are the voice of God. This sort of meditation is not meditating on what God has said, but uses a technique to explore the spirit world. In other words, it is divination.<sup>55</sup>

This opinion of *lectio divina*, though existent, is a minority viewpoint. The practice of *lectio divina* has experienced a resurgence in the modern Church among both Protestant and Catholic believers. Dr. Evan Howard, the founder and director of the Spirituality Shoppe: An Evangelical Center for the Study of Christian Spirituality and author of the article “*Lectio Divina* in the Evangelical Tradition,” observes:

People are publishing books and developing websites devoted to the meditative reading of Scripture in unprecedented numbers. Often now, when I inquire of the devotional habits of others, I hear that they are “doing *lectio*.” Small groups are increasingly using this practice in their devotions. Christians of all varieties—including evangelicals—are employing *lectio divina*.<sup>56</sup>

Around the country, classes have become available for spiritual formation, which includes students learning to participate in *lectio divina*, particularly in seminaries, but also in secular universities.

<sup>54</sup> Apprising Ministries, “Richard Foster—Celebration of Deception,” by Bob DeWaay <http://appraising.org/2012/05/02/richard-foster-celebration-of-deception/> (accessed December 12, 2013).

<sup>55</sup> Apprising Ministries, “Richard Foster—Celebration of Deception,” by Bob DeWaay <http://appraising.org/2012/05/02/richard-foster-celebration-of-deception/> (accessed December 12, 2013).

<sup>56</sup> Evan Howard, “*Lectio Divina* in the Evangelical Tradition,” in *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 5, no. 1 (2012), 56.

Dr. Peter Spychalla, assistant professor of New Testament and Spiritual Formation, offers the class *Reading and Praying Scripture for Spiritual Transformation*. The purpose of the class is to “revive your devotional life by learning to read and pray Scripture for spiritual transformation rather than reading merely for information. Learn how historic traditions and contemporary practice of *lectio divina* (spiritual reading of Scripture) can help you meditate on Scripture, pray Scripture, apply Scripture, and grow in life-changing intimacy with God.”<sup>57</sup> Note that this course focused on meditating on Scripture.

One danger with *lectio divina* is that it will be used improperly, encouraging individuals to meditate on material that worship false gods, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and other Eastern cultic religions. Since *lectio divina* is divine reading of Scripture, those who try this are in essence not practicing *lectio divina* at all. An example of participants trying to use *lectio divina* incorrectly has occurred in one particular secular university. This university offered a course for MBA students, *Spirituality for Business Leadership*, where *lectio divina* was falsely taught and practiced. The participants were encouraged to bring whatever material they wanted to meditate on: Scriptures, religious writings, or extra-biblical material from their own tradition (Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Taoist, or Hindu). This is a false misrepresentation of *lectio divina*. The participants who were not meditating on Scripture were not practicing *lectio divina*. Several of the participants added their comments on this exercise. One participant, who was not a Christian, noted his “nervousness or discomfort about being atheist/Buddhist/agnostic in what he

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<sup>57</sup>Peter D. Spychalla, “*Lectio Divina* (Sacred Reading),” Urbana Theological Seminary, entry posted on May 12, 2012, <http://blog.urbanaseminary.org/2012/05/17/lectio-divina-sacred-reading/> (accessed December 13, 2013).

perceived to be a largely Judeo-Christian environment.<sup>58</sup> On the other hand, another participant, who was a Christian businessman, noted how meditating on Scripture by practicing *lectio divina* helped him include God in his business decision making process.

*Lectio divina* is also being used as a primary component of spiritual retreats, which are based on the biblical example of retreating from one's everyday responsibilities in order to more clearly hear the Word of the Lord. For example, Moses retreated to Mount Sinai (where he encountered and heard God speak); Elijah went to a cave (where the word of the Lord came to him as a gentle whisper); Paul went to the Arabian desert; Jesus retreated in the desert for 40 days, to a mountainside for the night, and withdrew on many other occasions to seek God (Exod. 19:3-6; 1 Kings 19:9-12; Gal. 1:17-18; Mark 1:35; Luke 6:12-13). The Desert Fathers, who were among the first to practice *lectio divina*, regularly retreated to the desert.<sup>59</sup>

Spiritual retreats provide quiet solitude and seclusion, allowing time for meditation, prayer, and contemplation on the Word of God—the practice of *lectio divina*. “Contemplative Outreach,” founded by Thomas Keating, offers an online retreat where participants engage in *lectio divina*.<sup>60</sup> Christian spiritual retreat centers are available for spiritual renewal, healing, prayer, and personal growth. Many offer seclusion and

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<sup>58</sup> Andre L. Delbecq, “Spirituality for Business Leadership: Reporting on a Pilot Course for MBAs and CEOs,” in *Journal of Management Inquiry* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2000), 9:117.

<sup>59</sup> The Desert Fathers (third century AD) were Christians in the Middle East who sought Christ, His Word, prayer and contemplation in seclusion in the desert. They became known as monks, hermits, and ascetics. For more information about Desert Fathers, monks, hermits, or ascetics, see Peter H. Gorg, *The Desert Fathers: Saint Anthony and the Beginnings of Monasticism* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2011).

<sup>60</sup> *Spirituality & Practice*, <http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/ecourses> (accessed December 14, 2013).

solitude, allowing time to dwell on the Word of the Lord in the pursuit of transformation of mind and behavior.

Modern participants in *lectio divina* have also begun to incorporate journal writing into their practice. Christine Valters Paintner advocates journal writing in her book, *Lectio Divina: Contemplative Awakening and Awareness*:

The practice of writing in a journal connects us to the traditions of confession, meditation, praise, and lament. Journals are a safe space to explore what is happening inside of us. The act of writing itself is a form of prayer when it connects us with God. In a journal we can give voice to all the joys and struggles of our lives openly and honestly. Writing our prayers gives us a way to record what is happening in our inner world over time, so that we can notice places where we are stuck as well as patterns of growth and change. It assists us as we navigate our journey through life. It provides a way for us to explore our relationship with God and an opportunity to express our response to God.<sup>61</sup>

Writing down thoughts and feelings helps participants observe themselves more clearly and allows opportunity to see areas of struggle and weakness. As participants encounter God through practicing *lectio divina*, and begin to change, journal writing provides a way to process their transformative experience.

Believers today are rediscovering the positive impact that *lectio divina* can have on their lives. The world has become fast-paced, impatient, and focused on instant gratification, and there is no doubt that these societal attitudes have infiltrated the Church. Though culturally conditioned otherwise, many believers have realized that deep intimacy with God, and transformation of the mind and behavior, does not happen quickly nor without intentionality. *Lectio divina* is a systematic spiritual discipline that requires participants to slow down and experience God on a deeper level. Modern

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<sup>61</sup>Paintner, 104.

believers who practice *lectio divina* have rediscovered one of the most basic promises of the Christian faith: When God is pursued, people are transformed.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THEORETICAL FOUNDATION**

The purpose of this chapter is to explore relevant biblical, historical, and theological information associated with the model of ministry. The intent of this research was to examine how transformation of the human mind and behavior has been viewed from a spiritual and philosophical perspective. Additionally, the research was conducted to examine human response to the desire to be transformed and to identify a practice (or method) that can assist humans in this process.

#### **Biblical Foundation**

Throughout the Bible, man is depicted as in need of renewal from his sin nature, including a daily renewal from the physical, mental, social, and spiritual dysfunction that is experienced by all people on earth. Both the Old and New Testaments connect one's choice of faith and trust in God, and His Word, to the ability to experience an ongoing "renewal of the mind," which yields freedom from the thoughts, attitudes and behaviors that prevent one from living the abundant life that God intends. The spiritual practice of *lectio divina*—which is proposed in this project as an effective discipline for renewing thought patterns that are in conflict with biblical teaching, as well as transforming corresponding external behaviors—is rooted in this biblical affirmation.

## Old Testament

The Old Testament verse chosen to depict the “renewal of the mind” that leads to personal transformation is Isaiah 26:3: “You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.”

The book of Isaiah is attributed to Isaiah, the son of Amoz, who wrote it after seeing a vision from the Lord. Isaiah is considered to be the greatest of the Old Testament prophets. He is also the most often quoted prophet in the New Testament. He is thought to have received his “call” from God on the day that Uzziah, the once God-fearing king, died. When God called Isaiah, his reply was, “Here I am! Send me” (see Isa. 6:8). His prophetic ministry was pertinent during this time in history because God used Isaiah, whose name means “The Lord is salvation,” that is, “the Lord is the source of salvation,” to help the people understand that salvation could not be obtained by reliance upon man or idols, but only from God Himself.<sup>1</sup> God used Isaiah to communicate to the people that “the old world and way of living was passing, and an entirely new way of living was about to make its appearance in Jesus.”<sup>2</sup> Isaiah relentlessly pressed the people to turn from rebellion and live God’s way.

The book of Isaiah is God’s revelation of the inevitable conflict between divine glory and human pride. It displays the self-destruction that pride brings as well as the grace of God in restoring that destroyed humanity to Himself. The book “contains an unparalleled sweep of theology, all the way from creation to the new heavens and new

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<sup>1</sup>Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: The English Text, with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965), 3.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

earth, and from utter destruction to glorious redemption.<sup>3</sup> Isaiah's view of God reflects these tensions by fluctuating between a depiction of Him as the austere Judge who decrees destruction on a rebellious people, and God as the compassionate Redeemer who will not cast off a hopeless and despairing people.<sup>4</sup>

The book of Isaiah has been compared to the Bible in many ways. Like the Bible, the book has two major divisions—the first thirty-nine chapters warn of coming judgment on the nation of Judah unless they repent from their sins and turn back to God, and the last twenty-seven chapters reflect hope based on the future blessings and salvation that will come through the Messiah. As God's spokesperson, Isaiah told the people to turn from their idol worship, repent, and live holy lives that are consecrated to God, their Redeemer and Creator. In essence, Isaiah pronounced that their minds needed to be renewed so that their actions would realign with God's Law, His will for their lives.

### *Isaiah Chapter Twenty-Six*

Isaiah 26 is a song that reflects on the events portrayed in Isaiah 25. Here, the prophet acknowledges that Mount Zion, heaven and earth, and Israel will be transformed and made new in “that day” that is to come. Isaiah 25 begins with the prophet’s prayer that recognizes the Lord as Isaiah’s personal God and is a song of thanksgiving for God’s faithfulness in caring for and delivering his people. Verses 6-8 focus on the feast and God’s purpose in the destruction of the earth, which is to bring redemption. These verses depict “The Great Banquet on Mount Zion” where there will not only be the choicest of

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<sup>3</sup>John N. Oswalt, *Isaiah: The NIV Application Commentary, from Biblical Text . . . to Contemporary Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 17.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

food and drink, but also full access to the *divine presence* of God.<sup>5</sup> Verses 9-12 end the chapter with a theme of joy among God's people because God has delivered them from their enemies.

The beginning of chapter 26 continues from the previous chapter with a song of joy and thanksgiving because of God's victory over the city of oppression. Within this song of thanksgiving, Judah encourages herself to continue to keep faith in God, who has steadfastly kept faith with her.<sup>6</sup> However, this chapter fluctuates from contemplation of the glorious future, and the kind of steadfast trust necessary to participate in "that future" (verses 1-6), to a sober view of the "present" in which the people are not yet delivered (verses 7-19).<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, even within this sober view, there is the repeated affirmation that God *can* and *will* keep His word. This assures the people that God is aware of the present, and yet calls the people to a steadfast trust and reliance on Him for their future.

According to Oswalt, there are three units of thought in chapter 26: (1) thanks for God's deliverance (verses 1-6), (2) dependence on God (verses 7-19), and (3) promises to the faithful (verses 20-21).<sup>8</sup> This chapter focuses on the way in which the city perceives itself and its role in the world in light of who God really is, and "it becomes an

<sup>5</sup>Oswalt, *NIV Application*, 17.

<sup>6</sup>John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39: The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 459.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 470.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 297.

affirmation of trust and a call for God to demonstrate his sovereignty through his people.”<sup>9</sup>

*Isaiah Chapter Twenty-Six, Verse Three*

In Isaiah 26:3, the prophet urges the people to change their minds from trusting in anything other than God. This verse exhorts everyone to cast themselves solely upon God because it is only by trusting in Him that they would experience “perfect peace.” Isaiah’s call to keep their minds stayed on Him (or to renew their minds) in order to find peace, which comes from depending solely on God, reflects His understanding that the focus of their minds expresses their attitude and direction for their lives.

This beautifully expressed assurance of peace gives confidence that God will guard those who remain loyal to Him so that they may be certain of a place in the final triumph, but also recognizes that “God preserves those who look forward to this time so that they may be assured of reaching it.”<sup>10</sup> In His preservation, God promises to renew the minds of those who choose to depend on Him, instead of on themselves, so that they may live according to His will.

*Word Translation and Meaning*

Isaiah 26:3 has five key terms: *keep*, *perfect peace*, *mind*, *stayed*, and *trusts*. These English words are translated from the following Hebrew words:

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<sup>9</sup>Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, chapters 1-39*, 297.

<sup>10</sup>R. E. Clements, *Isaiah 1-39: New Century Bible Commentaries* (Grand Rapids, MI: William Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 212.

1. **Keep** is from *natsar*—watch, guard, observe, watch over, i.e., guards from dangers, preserves, e.g., Deut. 32:10, 25:21, 31:24, 40:12, 61:8; Isa. 26:3, 42:6, 49:8; Prov. 2:8, 20:28, 22:12.<sup>11</sup>
2. **Perfect Peace** is from *shalom*—completeness, soundness, welfare, safe, secure, health, prosperity, whole, tranquil, intact, unaffected, blessing, e.g., Isa. 38:17; Job 5:24; Gen. 43:27; Exod. 18:7; Judg. 18:15; 2 Sam. 11:7; 1 Sam. 17:18; Jer. 38:4.<sup>12</sup>
3. **Mind** is from *yetser*—a thought, inclination, contemplation, judgment, intention, meditated purpose, i.e., the content of thinking or reasoning, e.g., Gen. 6:5, 8:21; Deut. 31:21.<sup>13</sup> *Yetser* was widely used in rabbinic writings to express the whole attitude and direction of life of a person.<sup>14</sup> It is the human constitution (Ps. 103:14), an artifact formed, what we may call a frame of mind, or a mind-set, a total way of looking at things, the constant mind.<sup>15</sup>
4. **Stayed** is from *samuk*—placed, lay, lean, rest, support, unshakable, ascend, raise, firm, maintained, i.e., his heart is sustained, e.g., Gen. 37:27, 51:14; Ezra 30:6, 63:5, Isa. 59:16, 63:5, 3:6, 37:17, 24; 54:6, 119:116, 145:14, 111:8, 112:8.<sup>16</sup>
5. **Trusts** is from *batach*, confident, security, rely on, i.e., acceptance of the truth of a statement without evidence or investigation, a firm belief in someone or something, faith in Yahweh, e.g., 2 Kings 18:5, 30; Ps. 22:10; Isa. 36:15; Jer. 28:15; 29:31; Ps. 112:7.<sup>17</sup>

This verse teaches that a person whose mind is stayed on God will trust Him over all else and will experience peace. The promise of this verse is that God renews the minds of those who choose to depend on Him, instead of on themselves, so that they may live according to His will, which is to live in peace. This word was given to the people by the

<sup>11</sup>Charles Augustus Briggs, Francis Brown, and Samuel Rolles Driver, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Lancaster, TX: Snowball Publishing, 2010), 665.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 1022.

<sup>13</sup>Richard Batey, “Mind,” in *Harper’s Bible Dictionary*, ed. Paul J. Achtemeier (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1985), 637.

<sup>14</sup>Clements, 212.

<sup>15</sup>J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 214.

<sup>16</sup>Wilhelm Gesenius and Samuel Prideaux Tregelles, *Gesenius’ Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2010), 590.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

prophet Isaiah who was chosen as God's spokesperson. He was given the assignment to tell the people to repent and worship God. In essence, Isaiah pronounced that their minds needed to be renewed so that their actions would realign with God's law, His will for their lives.

## New Testament

The New Testament verse chosen to illustrate the impact that "renewing the mind" has on one's ability to live according to God's will is Romans 12:2: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

### *Background of the Book of Romans*

Paul's authorship of Romans is virtually undisputed, and the genuineness of the letter has never been seriously questioned by competent critics familiar with first-century history.<sup>18</sup> Scholars conclude that Paul wrote to the Roman Christians around A. D. 56-57 during the three month period he spent in Greece on his third missionary journey (see Rom. 15:23-29; Acts 20).<sup>19</sup> Paul's desire was to take the gospel west to Rome, and then to Spain, after completing his missionary work in the eastern Mediterranean (see Rom. 15:19, 24). Many speculate that the "church" in Rome, which consisted of small groups of new converts meeting in various homes across the region, as opposed to one

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<sup>18</sup>J. D. Douglas and Merrill C. Tenney, eds., *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 1248-1249.

<sup>19</sup>Walter Kaiser, Jr., *New International Archaeological Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 1835. (See the information under the footnote for Romans 1:1-7.)

centralized gathering, was begun by Jews who were converted on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:10), but had grown to also include Gentile believers.<sup>20</sup>

Paul's letter to the Romans reveals the purpose of his upcoming visit which was primarily to address the doctrinal and practical challenges that had arisen between the Jewish and Gentile converts in Rome.<sup>21</sup> The tension between the two groups of Christians was fueled by the Jews' belief that they were favored by God over the Gentiles because of their historical status as His covenant people. The Jews, who were given the Law and promises of God—the “first” words from God, the Old Testament—reasoned that the Gentiles, who came from a background of idolatry and unbelief, could not possibly hold the same status as they did even though they affirmed that both groups were given the “second” word—the New Testament.

Despite the Jews' criticism of the Gentiles, Paul chose to extend words of grace on their behalf. Paul, who came from a Jewish background and had Roman citizenship, understood their dilemma and frustrations, but was committed to clarifying the truth of the gospel. Through his letter, he wanted to help Jewish Christians understand the differences between righteousness by the Law and righteousness by grace, as well as the current role of Israel versus the role of the newly formed Christian church, which included both Jews and Gentiles.<sup>22</sup> In the book of Romans, Paul addressed these issues,

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<sup>20</sup>D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 243.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

as well as the relationship between the Jews and Gentiles, within the context of God's plan of love, unity, and the redemption for *all*.<sup>23</sup>

### *Romans Chapter Twelve*

Paul challenged and expected recent converts to Christianity to exude a holiness that came from the heart. Paul was adamant that it is not simply a matter of "now you are saved, this is how you behave;" instead, it is living in a way that reflects an understanding that God's will for His people is to live renewed through the power of the Spirit, not on their own strength.<sup>24</sup> This personal renewal is evidence of the holiness of Christ in the believer, which is displayed through the believer's desire to commit wholeheartedly to God, to be consecrated for His service, and to yield in all things to His will.

However, personal holiness and renewal is not an end in and of itself. Instead, a holy God calls a holy people so that they (collectively) may proclaim His wonderful deeds.<sup>25</sup> According to N. T. Wright, "It is summed up well at the beginning of Romans 12, in the appeal for self-offering and transformation through the renewal of the mind, resulting in the *mutual upbuilding* of those who are one body in the Messiah."<sup>26</sup> So, it is believers allowing the Spirit to renew their hearts and minds, not simply making modifications in their behavior, which produces personal and corporate transformation.

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<sup>23</sup>Carson, Moo, and Morris, 243-244.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>I. Howard Marshall and D. R. W. Wood, *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 478.

<sup>26</sup>N. T. Wright, *Paul: In Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009), 124.

*Romans Chapter Twelve, Verse Two*

Paul recognized the power of influence from various sources including social groups, cultural norms, institutions, traditions, and families on the development of a person's character and on their behavior. However, Paul admonishes the believers in Rome to resist these influences and "not be conformed to this world." In *Romans: A Shorter Commentary*, Cranfield questions whether the believers being addressed in Romans 12:2 really understand that because they belong to God's "new order" in Christ, they "therefore cannot be content to go on allowing themselves to be continually stamped afresh with the stamp of 'this present age' that is passing away."<sup>27</sup>

Instead, believers must resist the patterns of this present age with its poor conventions and standards of values.<sup>28</sup> "The good news," Cranfield offers, "is that they are not helpless victims of tyrannizing forces, but are able to resist this pressure which comes both from without and from within, because God's merciful action in Christ has provided the basis of resistance."<sup>29</sup> It is by the enabling of the Holy Spirit that Christians can resist the pressures to conform to the world around them in this age.

Though these pressures will be present until either one dies or Jesus returns, Cranfield suggests that when one becomes reborn from God, his or her pressures should be different.<sup>30</sup> The believer's pressure should change from being tempted to follow the

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<sup>27</sup>C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1985), 296.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

world to, instead, following the direction and leading of the Spirit of God. Cranfield describes the process by which one is “transformed by the renewal of the mind”:

[We should allow ourselves] to be transformed continually, remoulded, remade, so that [our] life here and now may more and more clearly exhibit signs and tokens of the coming order of God, that order which has already come—in Christ. And it is *by the renewing of your mind* [emphasis added] that this transformation is effected. It is as the Holy Spirit renews the fallen mind, loosening the bonds of its egocentricity so that it begins to think truly objectively instead of egocentrically, that a man’s whole life is transformed.<sup>31</sup>

The transformation *and* renewal of the mind can be understood as a metamorphosis, a complete alteration of thought processes and subsequent behaviors in the life of a believer in Christ.<sup>32</sup> This change can only be lasting and effective through the power of the Holy Spirit, who allows believers to be transformed into the image of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18).

The mind, under the control of the Holy Spirit, is renewed by the practice of reflection on the Word of God, which leads to a greater spiritual understanding of His law.<sup>33</sup> Only those who read Scripture, contemplate its words, and adjust their lives to do what it says will conform to the image of God. This individual will be able to discern what the perfect will of God is, which is always something “good and acceptable and perfect.”<sup>34</sup> The Greek word translated “prove (or discern)” can mean either ‘prove’, ‘test’,

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<sup>31</sup>Cranfield, 296.

<sup>32</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *World Biblical Commentary* (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1988), 713.

<sup>33</sup>Gerald Bray, “Romans,” in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament VI* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 297.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

or ‘approve’ (as a result of testing), which implies that the discernment of the will of God will be followed by obedient acceptance of it.<sup>35</sup>

In order to reflect the image of God, “the mind, so far from being an unfallen element of human nature, needs to be renewed if it is to be able to recognize and embrace the will of God (it is thus a warning against the illusion that conscience, as such and apart from its renewal by the Spirit and instruction by the discipline of the gospel, is a thoroughly reliable guide to moral conduct).”<sup>36</sup> Each individual Christian, therefore, has both the need and ability to be renewed, but only those who willingly cooperate with Spirit will live lives that are consistent with God’s will.

The description of God’s will as something “good and acceptable and perfect” may refer to believers obeying the Ten Commandments, especially the command to ‘love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength,’ and ‘love your neighbor as yourself.’<sup>37</sup> Following these commands is the foundation for living in accordance with God’s will, which is “perfect, complete, [and] absolute; for He claims us *wholly* for Himself and for our neighbors.”<sup>38</sup> Those who are transformed by the renewing of their minds recognize and gladly embrace these commands. The more one reads the Scriptures, inviting the Holy Spirit to enlighten the mind’s understanding, the more one is continually renewed every day. However, those who choose to not read Scripture regularly will not experience a renewed mind, and will mistake what God’s perfect will is, making it impossible to live lives that are pleasing to Him.

<sup>35</sup>Cranfield, 297.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 298.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

## *Word Translation and Meaning*

Romans 12:2 has twelve key words within the verse: *conformed, world, transformed, renewal, mind, testing, discern, will, God, good, acceptable, and perfect.*

These English words are translated from the following Greek words:

1. **Conformed** is from *schematize*, to comply with rules, standards, or laws according to social convention,<sup>39</sup> or to conform to a pattern or mold, e.g., Rom. 12:2; 1 Pet. 1:14.<sup>40</sup>
2. **World** is from *kosmos*, and in this verse is referring to secular or material matters as opposed to spiritual ones, or the system of practices or standards associated with secular society (that is, without reference to any demands or requirements of God)—‘world system, world’s standards, world.’<sup>41</sup> The idea is that man is in bondage to the elements which comprise the world (Col. 2:20) until he is born of God, e.g., 1 John 5:19; 1 Cor. 1:21.<sup>42</sup>
3. **Transform** is from the Greek word *metamorphoo*, to change into another form, transfigured,<sup>43</sup> and to believers, the obligation being to undergo a complete change which, under the power of God, will find expression in character and conduct. The present tense indicates a process; 2 Cor. 3:18 describes believers as being ‘transformed into the same image’ (i.e., of Christ in all His moral excellencies), the change being affected by the Holy Spirit,<sup>44</sup> to change the essential nature of something, e.g., Matt. 17:2; Mark 9:2.<sup>45</sup>
4. **Renewal** is from *anakainosis*. It refers to the ability to resume or re-establish after an interruption, give fresh life or strength to, extend the period of validity of (a license, subscription, or contract), replace or restore (something broken or worn out),<sup>46</sup> It also refers to the renewal of thought and will which Christians constantly need if they are going to show by their moral conduct that they belong to the new aeon and are members of the new humanity, refers

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<sup>39</sup>Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1996), 1:467.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 506.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 507.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Edward W. Goodrick and John R. Kohlenberger III, *The Strongest NIV Exhaustive Concordance* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 1570.

<sup>44</sup>W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White, Jr., *An Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1984), 639.

<sup>45</sup>Louw and Nida, 154.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 156.

to inward renewal, refers to the center of personal life, the Spirit of God who dwells and works in the Christian,<sup>47</sup> and to cause something to become new and different, with the implication of being superior, ‘to make new,’<sup>48</sup> e.g., Titus 3:5; Col. 3:10; Eph. 4:23; Rom. 8:9-13; 1 Cor. 12:13.<sup>49</sup>

5. **Mind** is from *nous*, disposition, practical reasoning, understanding, planning, thought, judgment, awareness.<sup>50</sup> The meaning of mind in this context expresses the inner orientation or moral attitude, i.e., in the inner direction of a Christian’s thought and will and the orientation of their moral consciousness, where there should be constant renewal.<sup>51</sup> The mind can, indeed, become conformed to Christ’s mind; through the risen Lord, the follower of Christ can experience the power and wisdom of the Lord, e.g., Eph. 4:23; 1 Cor. 2:16; Matt. 22:37; Ps. 7:9.<sup>52</sup>
6. **Test** is from *dakimazo*, in this context means ‘to prove,’ i.e., a procedure intended to establish the quality, performance, or reliability of something; a difficult situation revealing the strength or quality of someone or something,<sup>53</sup> e.g., Ps. 139:23; Jer. 17:10; 1 Chron. 29:17; Ps. 7:9.
7. **Discern** is from *deakreisis*, to recognize or find out, having or showing good judgment,<sup>54</sup> or to distinguish, note, notice, observe, perceive, remark, view, differentiate, distinguish, discriminate,<sup>55</sup> e.g., Prov. 16:21, 2:11; 1 Cor. 2:15, 12:10.
8. **Will** derives from the Greek word *diatheka*, wish or desire, i.e. you must live the rest of your earthly lives controlled by what God desires and not human passions,<sup>56</sup> or the new life of believers doing divine will.<sup>57</sup> This word was used primarily in the OT, and almost exclusively in the Septuagint for ‘covenant.’ God is depicted as determining the conditions of the relationship

<sup>47</sup>Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Gerhard Friedrich, and Gerhard Kittel, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 3:453.

<sup>48</sup>Louw and Nida, 593.

<sup>49</sup>Bromiley, Friedrich, and Kittel, 453.

<sup>50</sup>Allen C. Myers, *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 721.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Louw and Nida, 331.

<sup>54</sup>Barclay Newman, *A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament* (Stuttgart, Germany: United Bible Societies, 1993), 42.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>Louw and Nida, 287.

<sup>57</sup>Bromiley, Friedrich, and Kittel, 52-53.

between him and his people, which conditions were finally accomplished through the work of Jesus Christ. ‘Will/covenant’ was an expression of God’s promise and desire for his people,<sup>58</sup> e.g., Isa. 44:28; Matt. 18:14, 21:31; Mark 3:35; John 6:38.

9. **God** is from *theos*, the one supreme, supernatural being as creator and sustainer of the universe.<sup>59</sup> God is and he may be known. These form the foundation and inspiration of all true religion. Since the existence of God is not subject to scientific proof, it must be a postulate of faith; and since God transcends all his creation, he can only be known in his self-revelation. The Christian religion is distinctive in that it claims that God can be known as a personal God in his self-revelation in Scriptures. The Bible is written not to prove God is, but to reveal him in his activities. For that reason, the Biblical revelation of God is progressive, reaching its fullness in Jesus Christ his son,<sup>60</sup> e.g., Ps. 95:3, 97:9, 136:2; John 1:1; Acts 17:24; 1 Cor. 8:4-5.
10. **Good** is from *agathosyne*, for the Christian goodness, pleasant, joyful, agreeable, noble, honorable, admirable, worthy, beneficial, advantageous, well-being, prosperity. Christians must resist the temptation to do as they are done by, and in the face of evil must seek out and hold fast in their conduct that ‘good’ is what the law prescribes. God approves and accepts those who yield to the law,<sup>61</sup> e.g., Matt. 19:17; Rom. 12:9, 21; 1 Thess. 5:15, 21; 1 Tim. 2:3; Titus 3:8.
11. **Acceptable** is from *euarestos*, well-pleasing, acceptable, content, pertaining to that which causes someone to be pleased, that which is good and pleasing to God, i.e., it is used of God’s attitude towards human conduct. For Paul it is a goal of the Christian walk,<sup>62</sup> e.g., Col. 3:20; Rom. 12:1, 14:18.
12. **Perfect** is from *teleios*, complete, mature, absolute, whole, without blemish, faultless,<sup>63</sup> having all the required elements, qualities, or characteristics, free from any flaw, bring to completion, not lacking any moral quality.<sup>64</sup>

Isaiah 26:3 and Romans 12:2 acknowledge that in order to live “in perfect peace” and to be able “to discern what the will of God is,” believers must allow their minds to be renewed by the Holy Spirit to reflect the mind of Christ. God created people with the

<sup>58</sup>Myers, 1057.

<sup>59</sup>Louw and Nida, 136.

<sup>60</sup>Marshall and Wood, 418.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 425.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 9.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>Louw and Nida, 745.

ability to choose to focus their minds on God and His Word—as prescribed in the spiritual practice of *lectio divina*—instead of on themselves, which enables the Holy Spirit to continually transform their lives. It is by that power that believers are not only saved from their sin, but are also able to experience ongoing physical, mental, social, and spiritual renewal on this earth. This transformation allows believers to live in a way that reflects the image of God, bringing restoration to themselves and the world around them.

### **Historical Foundation**

The human mind has fascinated philosophers and theologians for centuries. From antiquity, these thinkers have recognized the connection between what humans think and how they act and have endeavored to identify how the mind can be conditioned in order to produce desirable behavior. Christian theologians understand this “desirable behavior” to be that which aligns with the teachings of Scripture. They also understand, however, that though humans are created in the image of God, they have an innate nature that acts contrary to His will. Numerous Scriptures deduce that every action that is contrary to the character and will of God begins with a mindset that does not align with the teachings of Scripture. Therefore, Paul commands believers to be transformed by renewing their minds so that they will know what God’s will is and can live according to it (Rom. 12:2).

### **Historical Perspectives on the Mind**

Throughout history, these and other theologians and philosophers have contributed widely to the understanding of the functionality of the human mind. Their theories have influenced the view of the Christian Church at large and have helped

leaders and lay people alike to gain clarity on how the mind influences human behavior. The primary purpose for exploring these philosophies is to provide a deeper understanding of how a person's behavior can change as a result of *renewing the mind* through the practice of reading Scripture and living under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

### *"Early Church" Theologians*

Origen (A.D. 185-254), known as the first systematic theologian and one of the Church Fathers, wrote extensively about the function and state of the soul in relation to a person's behavior.<sup>65</sup> Origen believed that the mind is part of the soul, and he also used the terms interchangeably.<sup>66</sup> He believed that every soul could achieve a union with God, not only after death but while on earth, which would affect the way he or she lived.<sup>67</sup> In order for the soul to achieve this behavior-altering union with God, Origen emphasized the necessity of personal holiness that included daily *prayer* and *reading Scripture*.

In Origen's work, *On Prayer*, he asserts that praying continuously is necessary to living a virtuous life. Origen insisted that prayer turns oneself from bodily concerns to spiritual things, and that when the soul, through prayer, becomes more spiritual, the person's entire personality, and then behavior, can transform. In order to move toward greater virtue, Origen suggested going three times per day to a consecrated place of worship that would help the mind be in the right disposition for prayer. He explained that

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<sup>65</sup>Bradley Green, *Shapers of Christian Orthodoxy* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2010), 118-119.

<sup>66</sup>Origen maintained that the soul, created by God, pre-existed the body to which it was assigned as a penalty for its sins. This viewpoint was widely rejected by most of the Greek fathers, and was then condemned in the sixth century. For more explanation, see J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1958), 344-345.

<sup>67</sup>Joseph Trigg, *Origen: The Bible and Philosophy in the Third-Century Church* (Atlanta, GA: J. Knox Publishing, 1983), 113.

during these times, one should stand with arms outstretched and eyes lifted up, and that prayers should include glorifying God, giving thanks to Him, confessing one's sins, and requesting spiritual blessings.<sup>68</sup>

In addition to prayer, Origen believed that knowing Scripture is imperative to the soul moving toward a closer union with God. Origen describes the role of Scripture as the basis for the soul's journey toward increasing virtue and conformation to God:

Before the soul arrives at perfection, it dwells in the wilderness where it is trained in the commandments of the Lord and where its faith is tested by temptations. And when it conquers one temptation and its faith has been proved in it, it comes to another one; and it passes, as it were, from one stage to another. When it proceeds through the different temptations of life and faith one by one, it is said to have stages in which increases in virtues are sought one by one. In this way there is fulfilled what is written, "They will go from virtue to virtue" (Psalm 84:7) until the soul arrives at its goal, namely the highest summit of virtues, and crosses the river of God and receives the heritage promised it.<sup>69</sup>

Origen explains that "during each stage the soul is enlightened by receiving an increase of splendor, illumined by the light of Wisdom, until it arrives at the Father of lights Himself."<sup>70</sup> In Origen's view, when someone commits to prayer, the study of Scripture, and repeated testing of personal faith on earth, his or her soul (or mind) will continually transform yielding increasingly virtuous behavior.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>68</sup>Trigg, 113-115.

<sup>69</sup>Origen, "Homily XXVII on Numbers," in *Origen: An Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer and Selected Works*, ed. Rowan A. Greer (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1979), 252.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid.

<sup>71</sup>Origen wrote numerous commentaries and Scriptural interpretations on both the OT and NT, expository sermons, apologies (defending the Christian faith), letters and translations of OT books. During Origen's time the OT was readily available and the NT was beginning to be circulated. For more explanation, see Linda Gray, "Origen," in *The Encyclopedia of Christian Literature*, ed. George T. Kurian (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2010), 2:502.

Evagrius (A.D. 345-399), a Christian monk and ascetic, composed several documents primarily intended to instruct monks and nuns in how to live godly lives. Evagrius believed that the soul functions with reason-spirit-desire and proclaimed that in order to live according to the highest level of godliness, a person must understand the three interrelated functions of the complex soul—*praktike*, *gnostike*, and *theologia*—and be willing to submit his or her whole soul to healthy conditioning, which includes the practices of self-awareness and intentional contemplation of the divine.<sup>72</sup>

Evagrius identified *praktike* as the component of the soul that is aware of the need to purify one's mind from persistent evil thoughts and misguided passions which, he believed, correspond with demon influences. He identified gluttony, fornication, love of money, anger, sadness, listlessness or boredom, vainglory, and pride as the primary passions which lead to sin and taught that every person should carefully observe personal thoughts and behavior to identify areas of weakness.<sup>73</sup> By prioritizing this practice of self-awareness, Evagrius believed that people could train themselves to understand their temptation(s) and devise a plan to overcome them. Evagrius held that practicing self-awareness produces an “ordered feeling” where one chooses to go beyond passions and can, therefore, live a more holy life in accordance with God’s ordinances.<sup>74</sup>

Evagrius acknowledged, however, that conditioning of one's *praktike* alone was not enough to transform behavior in a lasting way. He recognized that without activating both one's *gnostike*—contemplation of the Scriptures, knowledge of God, and creation—

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<sup>72</sup>Kevin Corrigan, *Evagrius and Gregory: Views of Soul in Late Antiquity* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Group, 2009), 43.

<sup>73</sup>Note that these are similar to the seven deadly sins taught in the Roman Catholic tradition.

<sup>74</sup>Corrigan, 43-45.

and *theologia*—the recognition that every individual is made for communion with the divine, the highest form of intimate knowing of the Trinity—a person would be unable to live a truly transformed life. Evagrius believed that contemplation of “intelligible realities,” such as Scripture and creation, produces an understanding of God that causes a shift in one’s focus from the temporal to the divine, yielding positive behavior change in a person’s life.<sup>75</sup> Evagrius also believed that prayer, meditation, and contemplation of the Trinity allow individuals to overcome passions and gain substantial knowledge of Christ, the highest form of intimate knowledge.<sup>76</sup>

Evagrius viewed these various paths to divine knowledge as a kind of chain that spirals upward leading individuals to ascend on their souls’ journeys toward “union with the divine Spirit.”<sup>77</sup> Turning over one’s mind to God produces this mystical ascent, where bodies disappear and the mind achieves or returns to its true nature, and the individual is free to live as God originally designed.<sup>78</sup>

Evagrius affirmed the individual’s ability to transform into the likeness of God by putting the mind, illumined by God, in charge of the whole person. By choosing to be aware of unchecked or misguided desires, and by turning one’s focus to awareness of the

<sup>75</sup>Corrigan, 43-45.

<sup>76</sup>Evagrius suggested three considerations for contemplation that leads to an ascent: (1) To become wise, partake of the Eucharist (the body and blood of Christ). (2) Practice logical thought with a Christian picture on everything. (3) Receive a series of words, or Scripture, that could be remembered and that nourish and keep oneself righteous. (These are explained in Evagrius’ *Kephalaia Gnostica*. This is located in a modern book: Evagrius, “Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus,” in *Oxford Early Christian Studies*, trans. Robert E. Sinkewicz (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>77</sup>Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Erwin Fahlbusch, *Encyclopedia of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), 3:677.

<sup>78</sup>See Evagrius, “Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus,” in *Oxford Early Christian Studies*, trans. Robert E. Sinkewicz (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001).

divine, a person may expect his or her impulses and passions to be restored back to their intended operations. When the mind is exercised in this way, a virtuous and free life will generate. Evagrius warns, however, that a person who chooses not to condition his or her mind in this way, and who instead focuses on the lusts and passions of the world, will experience a life of dysfunction and destruction.<sup>79</sup>

Augustine (A.D. 354-430), the theologian who, other than Jesus and Paul, is known to have had the greatest influence on Christian thinking, and who was also a central shaper of both Roman Catholic and Protestant dogma, discussed his understanding of the soul/mind as it relates to human behavior. Within his composition, *On the Soul and its Origin*, Augustine argues his idea that the soul dominates the body.<sup>80</sup> And, he contends, it is the state of the soul/mind that determines how an individual chooses to live.

Augustine experienced a radical conversion to Christianity when he read a verse from a Bible that spoke specifically to the situation he was experiencing in his life. From that day forward, Augustine was obsessed with knowing God more through the study of Scripture, and he soon became an expert on the Word of God, which he taught openly and enthusiastically. In addition, because his life was changed through his interaction with Scripture, he was adamant that others could also be transformed in this manner.

Augustine used Scripture to support his position that in order to change outward behavior, the mind must be renewed by putting off the “old man” and putting on the “new man.” The way the individual is transformed from “old” to “new” is not simply by

<sup>79</sup>Corrigan, 47.

<sup>80</sup>Augustine, “On the Soul and its Origin,” in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975) 5:355.

intellectual assent, but by being spiritually renewed by the knowledge of God found in Scripture, the Word of God:

Renew in the knowledge of God in righteousness and holiness of truth. He who is thus renewed by daily advancing in the knowledge of God, in righteousness and holiness of truth, is changing the direction of his love from the temporal to the eternal, from the visible to the intelligible, from the carnal to the spiritual; diligently endeavoring to curb and abate all lust for the one, and to bind himself in charity to the other. In which all his success depends on the divine aid; for it is the Word of God, that ‘without me ye can do nothing.’<sup>81</sup>

Augustine believed that the individual’s transformation from the temporal to the eternal was indeed possible, but only through intentional dependence on the Word of God.

Augustine also concluded that the battle between flesh and the soul/mind is a never-ending struggle that remains as long as a person lives on earth.

In the *City of God*<sup>82</sup> and *Confessions*,<sup>83</sup> Augustine examines these persistent lusts that resonate in the mind and how these passions, if left unchecked, can control the behavior of the individual. Augustine acknowledged the conflicting wills and struggles with sin that prevent individuals from being daily renewed by God. However, Augustine maintained that God created the human race with free will, which was good. It was the human race in Adam that corrupted that good will and made it wicked.<sup>84</sup> Because of his belief in the inherent goodness of human free will, Augustine urged people to exercise this God-given gift in a way that would bring renewal, instead of destruction, to their

<sup>81</sup>Augustine, “The Perfection of the Image in the Contemplation of God,” in *Augustine: Later Works*, ed. John Burnaby (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1955), 122.

<sup>82</sup>For additional information see Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (New York, NY: Modern Library, 1950).

<sup>83</sup>For additional information see Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1991).

<sup>84</sup>Augustine, *The City of God*, 422-423.

lives. Augustine believed that in order to accomplish this, “individuals should avoid the mingling and involvement of themselves in the faults and errors of men, but instead should set their course in the love and truth, and enquiry after it.”<sup>85</sup> Of course, the love and truth Augustine regularly mentioned are the love and truth of God as expressed in His Word.

Augustine was also convinced that, despite humans’ base desires and misuse of free will, all are made in the image of God, and are, according to Scripture, “sons of God.” Therefore, the mind has the capacity to be renewed in the knowledge of God, not outwardly but inwardly, from day to day as we are being perfected, and it is this continual renewal that, over time, changes the way a person lives.<sup>86</sup> This transformation comes through meditation on the Word of God, which according to Augustine, is the main avenue that leads to wisdom and truth.

### *Theologians of the Reformation*

Martin Luther (1483-1546), the former monk and theologian, led the Protestant Reformation that forever changed the Christian Church. Luther preached the Word of God because he understood that Scripture is the greatest truth given from God to help his people live according to His ways. Until this time, only the clergy were entrusted with reading, understanding, and interpreting the Word of God. Luther, however, expressed his belief that every person should have a Bible to read, and he made getting Bibles into the hands of lay people one of his greatest priorities. The Roman Catholic Church was

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<sup>85</sup> Augustine, “The Trinity,” in *Augustine: Later Works*, ed. John Burnaby (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1955), 39.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid.

especially resistant to Luther's viewpoint and held fast to their belief that only those who were clergy in the Roman Catholic Church, well-educated and trained in theology, and upheld that the Church's tradition was equal to the authority of Scripture, should be allowed to read and teach the Word.<sup>87</sup>

Although Luther was severely criticized for his position, he maintained that the Word of God was a gift that every person should be able to utilize, and was, in fact, necessary for living a godly life. Propelling Luther's cause from wishful thinking to reality was the invention of the printing press, which allowed Bibles to be widely copied and distributed. The combination of this new invention and Luther's unwavering campaign to get Bibles into the hands of all people began to erode the long-held belief that only clergy should be allowed to interpret the Bible, and soon, people began reading and studying Scripture on their own.

Luther felt that reading Scripture should be one of the chief practices of every Christian because, as the Bible points out, faith comes from hearing the Word. In his *Lectures on Hebrews*, Luther writes: "For if you ask a Christian what the work is by which he becomes worthy of the 'Christian,' he would be able to give absolutely no other answer than that it is the hearing of the Word of God, that is, faith."<sup>88</sup> Luther believed that a Christian should understand that Christ not only died on the cross for each

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<sup>87</sup>For more information and discussion on both viewpoints from the Roman Catholic Church and Martin Luther's Reformation, see: Raymond Collins, "Scripture and Tradition," in *The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, ed. Richard P. McBrien (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1995), 1178-79; Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform 1250-1550: an Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980) 199-209; Mark A. Noll, "Martin Luther," in *Renaissance & Reformation: Primary Sources*, ed. Peggy Saari and Aaron Saari (Farmington Hills, MI: The Gale Group, Inc., 2002), 118-128.

<sup>88</sup>Martin Luther, "Lectures on Hebrews," in *Luther's Works 29*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publisher, 1968), 224.

individual, but also provided, through Scripture, instructions for holy living that each person should learn to follow. According to this understanding, when people consistently feed their minds with the Word of God, their bodies tend to carry out and apply what they read.<sup>89</sup> Hence, their actions will begin to conform to God's precepts, and their lives will transform.

John Calvin (1509-1564), another theologian of the Reformed Tradition, was the first systematic theologian to comment on every book in the Bible with the exception of Revelation. The central theme to Calvin's theology was that individuals are "predestined," "elected," or "chosen" by God before they are born. However, in Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, he stated that knowledge of God, and the innate sense of God is naturally implanted within every human mind.<sup>90</sup> Calvin explained that "our very being is nothing else than subsistence in God alone. It follows that one cannot think about oneself without also thinking of God on whom one is completely dependent."<sup>91</sup> He persisted that all should turn their minds towards God because it is in Him that humanity lives and moves, and through Him that people are transformed.

Calvin magnified God's sovereignty, asserting that God is the Redeemer and Savior of the world who has the passionate desire to redeem and transform everyone. He upheld that God maintains complete control over all things and events, and he asserted

<sup>89</sup>Martin Luther, "Lecture on Hebrews," in *Luther Early Theological Works*, ed. James Atkinson, (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1962), 24.

<sup>90</sup>John Calvin, "The Knowledge of God Has Been Naturally Implanted in the Minds of Men," in *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John McNeill (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1960), 43.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid.

that not even “the devil can do anything unless God wills and assents to it.”<sup>92</sup> He believed in God’s “providence,” with the understanding that God destines all things for our good and for His glory.<sup>93</sup>

Calvin was adamant that the study of Scripture was one of the keys to personal redemption because within it lays the power to transform and renew the mind of the individual. This power is that of the Holy Spirit, who worked through the human authors to communicate God’s message, and who continues to work in the lives of those who read the inspired Word. Calvin realized that the Christian life is a never-ending struggle against the world, the flesh and the devil.<sup>94</sup> Because of this, he believed there is a need for continual repentance, sanctification (the lifelong process of becoming holy), and perseverance of the saints.

### *Modern Philosophers and Theologians*

Rene Descartes (1596-1650), French mathematician, Western philosopher, and physiologist, is widely known for his famous quote, “I think, therefore I am,” from his composition, *Meditations on First Philosophy*.<sup>95</sup> This proclamation reflects his understanding of the natural world, which included an immaterial mind that, in human beings, was directly related to the material brain. Descartes identified the mind with

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<sup>92</sup>Calvin, “Naturally Implanted in the Minds of Men,” 43.

<sup>93</sup>John Calvin, “The Knowledge of God Shines Forth in the Fashioning of the Universe and the Continuing Government,” in *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John McNeill (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1960), 51-52.

<sup>94</sup>John Calvin, “Only Damnable Things Come Forth from Man’s Corrupt Nature,” in *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John McNeill (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1960), 289.

<sup>95</sup>Rene Descartes, “Discourse on Method,” in *Descartes Philosophical Writings*, ed. Norman Kemp Smith (New York, NY: Random House, 1958), 119.

*consciousness and self-awareness* and proclaimed the mind to be the seat of intelligence.<sup>96</sup> Its function, then, is that which makes a person who he or she is.

Descartes agreed with Plato's dualistic approach—that the mind and body are two distinct entities—and is accredited with making this a well-known concept in the modern era where it has become known as “mind-body dualism.”<sup>97</sup> Descartes explained how the state of a person's mind directly correlates to his or her behavior. He posited that the emotional and moral life of an individual is seated in his or her mind and that a “passion of the soul” is a mental state (or thought) that arises as a direct result of brain activity. In Descartes view, it is such passions that can move a person to a related action. In his composition, *Passions of the Soul*, Descartes writes:

. . . the action and the passion are always one and the same thing . . . to understand the passions of the soul its functions must be distinguished from those of the body. . . . we do not observe the existence of any subject which more immediately acts upon our soul than the body to which it is joined, and that we must consequently consider that what in the soul is a passion is in the body commonly speaking an action. . . . we have reason to believe that every kind of thought which exists in us belongs to the soul.<sup>98</sup>

Descartes also explains how individuals can overcome and control their passions:

. . . there is a special reason which prevents the soul from being able at once to change or arrest its passions, which has caused me to say in defining them that they are not only caused, but are also maintained and strengthened by some particular movement of the spirits. This reason is that they are nearly all accompanied by some commotion which takes place in the heart, and in

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<sup>96</sup>Rene Descartes, “Rules for the Direction of the Mind,” and “Meditations on the First Philosophy,” in *Great Books of the Western World, Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc.*, ed. Robert Maynard Hutchins (Chicago, IL: William Benton Publisher, 1952) 31:1-12, 69-75.

<sup>97</sup>Rene Descartes, “Letters on the Mind-Body Problem,” in *Descartes Philosophical Writings*, ed. Norman Kemp Smith (New York, NY: Random House, Inc., 1958), 249-263. Note that Descartes wrote these letters to Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia in 1643 as they discussed and articulated their ideas about the mind-body problem.

<sup>98</sup>Rene Descartes, “The Passions of the Soul,” in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, eds. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1955), 331-332.

consequence also in the whole of the body and the animal spirits, so that until this commotion has subsided, they remain present to our thoughts. . . . The most that the will can do while this commotion is in its full strength is not to yield to its effects and to restrain . . . the body.<sup>99</sup>

Descartes believed that the mind, with proper training, was capable of restraining the body from acting out certain passions. To this end, he offered in his treatise, *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*, an extensive set of instructions for how an individual can learn to control his or her mind to produce positive behavior.<sup>100</sup> Over the course of twenty-one rules, Decartes mapped out a plan that, if followed, would sufficiently train the mind to tame those passions that influence undesirable behavior, yielding instead appropriate behavior.

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), known by many as America's greatest theologian and philosopher, was known for his spiritual discipline, his logical and compelling sermons, and the way he included God's holiness in the larger picture of divine beauty. He was a leading preacher of the revivals called the Great Awakening that penetrated the American colonies in the 1730s and 1740s.

One of Edwards's greatest passions was to get to the root of a person's thoughts and feelings, to understand the inner life, and how it influences outward behavior.<sup>101</sup> Edwards focused on the role of a believer's holy affections, or the moral and spiritual life, as strong inclinations of the soul that involve the mind as it discerns, views and

<sup>99</sup>Descartes, "Passions of the Soul," 352.

<sup>100</sup>Rene Descartes, "Rules for the Direction of the Mind," in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, eds. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1955), 1-77.

<sup>101</sup>Alexander Allen, *Jonathan Edwards* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1889), 21.

judges.<sup>102</sup> Edwards believed these holy affections greatly influence a person's thinking and acting, because due to the laws of union of soul and body, there is never a time in which the affections do not affect the body.<sup>103</sup> The habits of the mind will guide and teach a person to be holy in his actions, speech, and behavior.<sup>104</sup> Edwards was adamant that habits of the mind should be formed from Scripture.

When the mind is enlightened spiritually and rightly to understand the Scripture, it is enabled to see that in the Scripture, which before was not seen, by reason of blindness. . . . Spiritually enlightening the eyes to understand the Scripture, is to open the eyes, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law" (Ps. 119:18); which argues that the reason why the same was not seen in the Scripture before, was that the eyes were shut. . . . Spiritually to understand the Scripture, is to have the eyes of the mind opened, to behold the wonderful spiritual excellency of the glorious things contained in the true meaning of it, and that always were contained in it, ever since it was written . . .<sup>105</sup>

Edwards believed that it is God's holiness, and the holiness of the Word itself that draws the saints to read it. When the person reads Scripture, the Holy Spirit opens the mind for spiritual illumination, sheds light upon it, and God's Word is communicated with understanding.<sup>106</sup> When this happens, the Spirit operates as an infused power, directly moving humans to action.<sup>107</sup> Edwards calls this person an "illumined man."<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>102</sup>William J. Danaher, *The Trinitarian Ethics of Jonathan Edwards* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 120-121. This book was written with excerpts from Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid.

<sup>104</sup>Jonathan Edwards, "Religious Affections," in *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. John E. Smith (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959), 2:283.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., 280.

<sup>106</sup>Conrad Cherry, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1966), 27-28.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., 37.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., 28.

Edwards believed that people who sought the mind of Christ through the study of the Word and by the power of the Holy Spirit could live morally excellent lives, which he described as a reflection of God's righteousness. He understood that true faith in God involves allowing the mind to be transformed by Him and suggested that faith without the engagement of the mind is mere sentimentalism.<sup>109</sup> Edwards's gift to the Church was his emphasis on encouraging people to read Scripture and allow the Holy Spirit to give them the mind of Christ so that their lives would reflect the character and will of God.

Karl Barth (1886-1968), known for his Protestant systematic theology, wrote a massive twelve-volume composition, *Church Dogmatics*,<sup>110</sup> that continues to be a resource for theologians and preachers today. Within this document, Barth demonstrates the reality of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ, through whom one's life can transform to more fully reflect the character of God.

Barth illustrated that God revealed Himself not only through Jesus Christ, but also through the Word of God. He admonished believers to receive in faith the Word of God because it is God's own Word about Himself.<sup>111</sup> A teacher of theology, Barth encouraged students to take seriously the study of God's Word and required them to exegete, in order to most fully capture the truth of God's character through the text.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>109</sup>Cherry, 15.

<sup>110</sup>See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: A Selection*, ed. G. W. Bromiley (New York, NY: Harper Torchbooks, 1962).

<sup>111</sup>Jaroslav Pelikan, *Christian Doctrine and Modern Culture since 1700* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 299-300.

<sup>112</sup>Eerhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 190-209.

However, Barth was careful to point out that one cannot understand Scripture without the illumination of the Holy Spirit. He persistently pointed out that since Scripture is God revealing Himself, those who attempt to read it should *pray* for divine revelation. Then, they should receive the word of God given to them in faith and think through its meaning for their lives.<sup>113</sup> He advised, “Keep to the Word of God, the holy Scripture, that God has given us. As you read it, be sure to bathe yourself in prayer.”<sup>114</sup> Without this discipline, Barth believed that it was difficult to correctly understand God’s character. And a misunderstanding of God could often lead to a misapplication of Scripture in the lives of believers. A proper understanding, however, leads to a transformation of mind that produces righteous living.

This brief historical survey gives insight into the progression of the understanding of the human mind from antiquity, to the birth of Christianity, and through the Church age. Philosophers and theologians have offered many different viewpoints on the function of the mind, and most agree, though their understanding of the process varies, that the mind can be conditioned to influence human behavior. For Christian theologians, the *renewal of the mind* is foundational to the *transformation* of the believer into Christ-likeness. They recognize, however, that this renewal is not possible without knowledge of the Word of God and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, nor will it take place without the willing participation of the believer. It is a choice. When believers choose collectively—as the Church—to yield to the Spirit’s work of transformation, the world will see the image and likeness of God and lives will be changed.

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<sup>113</sup>Busch, 190-209.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., 250-260.

### History of *Lectio Divina*

Though not termed *lectio divina* until the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the practice has roots in ancient Judaism. Throughout history, the Jews have read and meditated on the first five books of the Word of God, known as the *Torah*, or the *Law of Moses*—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Traditionally there have been two approaches to reading the Torah. The first is to discover the literal meaning of the Biblical text.<sup>115</sup> The second, a more subjective approach, encourages the reader to seek a deeper spiritual and personal meaning.<sup>116</sup> Both are important, but the latter provided the foundation for *lectio divina*.<sup>117</sup>

The practice of *lectio divina*, though not yet called this, was an integral part of the early monastic tradition (150 B.C.-A.D. 68). The monastic community, such as the Essenes, or Qumranites, developed it out of a desire for ascetic living and personal holiness.<sup>118</sup> Their lifestyle illustrates the seriousness with which they approached the Scriptures:

The Essenes/Qumranites were a pre-Christian religious sect of Jewish Palestinians who lived ascetic lives in small communities on the western shore of the Dead Sea. They practiced fervent, rigorous observance of the Torah in expectation of a Davidic-Aaronic Messiah. In 68 AD, these cells, or communities were destroyed by the Romans. The Dead Sea Scrolls, first discovered in the caves near Qumran in 1947, detail the rules of the community life of the Essenes.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>115</sup>David G. Benner, *Opening to God: Lectio Divina and Life as Prayer* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 47.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid.

<sup>118</sup>Ascetic living included withdrawal from the world, renunciation, solitude, work, fasting, voluntary celibacy, community prayer, and simple living, including disposing of personal wealth.

<sup>119</sup>Benner, xxxi.

Since the Essenes/Qumranites lived during a time when copies of the Torah were not widely available, and the majority of people were illiterate, the monks gathered collectively on a regular basis to hear a member of their community read from the living, sacred Word of God. During this exercise, the monks were taught to interact with the text by listening with their minds, but also with their hearts:

Many now seek a deeper healing that embraces the whole person, including the soul. . . . From the very earliest accounts of monastic *lectio divina*, “divine” or “spiritual reading” was essential to any deliberate spiritual life. This kind of reading is quite different from that of scanning a text for useful facts and bits of information, or advancing along an exciting plot line to a climax in the action. It is . . . a *meditative approach*, by which the reader seeks to taste and savor the beauty and truth of every phrase and passage. This process of *contemplative reading* . . . increases the desire to seek a realm where all that is lovely and unspoiled may be found. . . . This kind of reading is itself an act of prayer. And, indeed, it is in prayer that God manifests His Presence to us.<sup>120</sup>

This approach encouraged listeners not just to gain knowledge about Scripture, but instructed them on how to be transformed by it.

In the third and fourth centuries, philosophers and theologians continued to demonstrate the principles of *lectio divina* in their recommendations for believers on the discipline of Scripture reading. Origen (A.D. 185-254) used a Greek phrase, *theological anagnosis*, or “divine reading,” to describe this way of approaching Scripture individually.<sup>121</sup> Origen expressed the principles of *lectio divina*, affirming that in order to read the Bible profitably, it is necessary to do so with attention, constancy, and prayer.<sup>122</sup> He helped readers recognize the multilayered meanings within Scripture and exhorted

<sup>120</sup>Benner, xii-xiii.

<sup>121</sup>Ibid., 48.

<sup>122</sup>Stephen J. Binz, *Conversing with God in Scripture: A Contemporary Approach to Lectio Divina* (Ijamsville, MD: Word Among Us Press, 2008), 15.

everyone who read the Word of God to find not only historical or theological information, but also a “personal message” within the text that could be applied to life.

The term *lectio divina* is found as early as the fourth century in the writings of Saint Jerome. The harmony between biblical scholarship, which reveals the *literal* meaning, and contemplation, which uncovers the *spiritual* meaning, were key elements in his writings.<sup>123</sup> According to Jerome, the interplay of these two elements provided the necessary framework for “prayerful reflection,” which would enable all believers to engage in reading Scripture in a personally transformative way.<sup>124</sup>

In fact, Jerome posited that the person who engages in this practice is more apt to experience fully the grace of God’s Word. In *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, 25, he states, “Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ,” which implies that one who has not chosen to interact with Scripture cannot accurately know Christ and have a life that reflects His true character.<sup>125</sup>

Jerome corresponded regularly with Augustine of Hippo (A.D. 354-430), most commonly known as Saint Augustine. Augustine was adamant about reading the Word of God. He identified the importance of reading both the Old and New Testaments because of the critical relationship between them. He is often quoted as stating: “The NT lies hidden in the Old, and the OT is unveiled in the New.”<sup>126</sup> Like Jerome, Augustine believed there are both a literal and a spiritual, or personal, interpretation of Scripture.

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<sup>123</sup>Binz, 50-51.

<sup>124</sup>Ibid.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid.

<sup>126</sup>Ibid., 31.

Augustine also expresses that personal transformation is ignited by the reflective reading of the Holy Scripture, through which forms habits of the heart and mind.

Leclercq summarizes Augustine's understanding of how individuals should approach reading the Word of God: "Holy Scripture is a mirror. In it one sees the picture he should reproduce. As one reads he can compare himself with what he ought to be and try to acquire what the picture needs so that it can resemble the model."<sup>127</sup>

In the sixth century, Benedict of Nursia, a monk, wrote a book, *The Rule of St. Benedict* (commonly shortened, *The Rule*), as a guide and set of instructions for monks. To promote intimacy and communion with God, Benedict advocates the practice of *lectio divina*, which includes *meditating*, *contemplating*, and *praying* Scripture.<sup>128</sup> Taught formally in monasteries (a school monks attended known as a "school for the service of God"), Benedict explains in *The Rule* that the practice of *lectio divina* should be incorporated into all aspects of daily monastic life.

In Chapter 48, "The Daily Manual Labor," Benedict says, "Idleness is the enemy of the soul. Therefore, the brothers should have specific periods for manual labor as well as for prayerful reading [*lectio divina*]."<sup>129</sup> Adalbert de Vogue comments on the effect this daily practice had on the monks:

. . . the ancient office [of monks] was made up of psalms and prayers. Similarly, the monastic day consisted of manual work accompanied by 'meditation' and interspersed with prayers. It was customary for the [monk] . . . to accompany the activity of their hands with that of their mouths, that is, with the oral repetition of

<sup>127</sup>Jean Leclercq, *Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, trans. Catharine Misrahi (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 1961), 100.

<sup>128</sup>Saint Benedict, "The Rule of St. Benedict," in *Vintage Spiritual Classics*, ed. Timothy Fry (New York, NY: Random House, 1998), 47.

<sup>129</sup>Ibid.

scriptural texts, which they called *meditation*. The Psalter was one of the favorite texts used for this exercise. Thus the monk was doing the same thing at work as at the office; in both the time flowed by in the continual recitation of scripture, and especially of the psalms. Prayer was the response, both at work and at office, to this incessant hearing of the Word of God.<sup>130</sup>

The monk's response to his consistent, reflective study of the Scriptures was a life of prayer. Because of this, *lectio divina* became commonly defined as "praying the Scriptures." Michael Casey says: "Fundamentally it is the atmosphere of prayer that penetrates every aspect of holy reading that makes it [*lectio*] distinctive . . . Prayer accompanies us as we open the book and settle our mind, as we read the page and ponder its meaning."<sup>131</sup>

Though Saints Jerome, Augustine, and Benedict described and advocated the practice of *lectio divina*, it was a monk, Guigo II, during the twelfth century, who turned the somewhat intangible practice into a measurable spiritual discipline. His *Ladder of Monks* describes *lectio divina* as a formalized, four-step process that engages and transforms the mind of the reader:

Reading [*lectio*] is a directing of the mind to a careful looking at the scriptures. Meditation [*meditatio*] is a studious activity of the mind, probing the knowledge of some hidden truth under the guidance of our own reason. Prayer [*oratio*] is a devout turning of the heart to God to get ills removed or to obtain good things. Contemplation [*contemplatio*] is a certain elevation above itself of the mind which is suspended in God, tasting the joys of eternal sweetness. . . . Reading looks for the sweetness of the life of blessedness, meditation locates it, prayer asks for it, contemplation tastes it. Reading, as it were, puts the solid food into our mouths, meditation chews it and breaks it down, prayer obtains the flavor of it and contemplation is the very sweetness which makes us glad and refreshes us.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>130</sup>Adalbert de Vogue, *The Rule of Saint Benedict: a Doctrinal and Spiritual Commentary*, trans. John Baptist Hasbrouck (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1983), 128-129.

<sup>131</sup>Michael Casey, *Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina* (Liguori, MO: Liguori Triumph, 1996), 61.

<sup>132</sup>Guigo II, "The Ladder of Monks," in *Ways of Imperfection: An Exploration of Christian Spirituality*, Simon Tugwell (Springfield, IL: Templegate Publishers, 1985), 94.

Guigo II's approach became well-known from his book, *The Ladder of Monks*.

Over the centuries, many have concluded that Guigo II understood that this form of meditative prayer, when interacting with the Word of God, leads to change and transformation:

Reading seeks for the sweetness of the blessed life, meditation perceives it, prayer asks for it, contemplation tastes it. Reading . . . puts food whole into the mouth, meditation chews it and breaks it up, prayer extracts its flavor, contemplation is the sweetness itself which gladdens and refreshes. Reading works on the outside, meditation on the . . . essential part, the heart. Prayer asks for what we long for, contemplation gives us delight in the sweetness which we have found.<sup>133</sup>

This practice has become traditionally known in many circles as “Feasting on the Word.” Taking a bite—*lectio*, chewing on it—*meditatio*, savoring the essence—*oratio*, and digesting the word to become part of the body—*contemplatio*.<sup>134</sup>

In the early sixteenth century, Martin Luther, a former Roman Catholic monk and the leader of the Protestant Reformation, challenged the strictly intellectual study of Scripture common in circles outside the monastery, as well as the notion that this discipline was only for those who were specially trained. During the Reformation, Luther emphasized the priesthood of *all* believers, the understanding that every saint could engage in spiritual disciplines and was able to be personally transformed by these practices. Luther came against the Roman Catholic tradition that advocated that only the priests and clergy could be partakers of the grace of God that dispensed spiritual truths to

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<sup>133</sup>Guigo II, *The Ladder of Monks and Twelve Meditations*, trans. Edmund Colledge and James Walsh (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, Inc., 1978), 68-69.

<sup>134</sup>Luke Dysinger, “*Lectio Divina*,” in *The Oblate Life*, ed. Gervase Holdaway (Collegeville, MI: Liturgical Press, 2008), 109.

laymen.<sup>135</sup> Instead, Luther gave suggestions in his book, *A Simple Way to Pray*, on how all believers can practice the spiritual discipline of prayer and recommended a routine of daily prayer. Luther's method included a fourfold way of meditating on Scripture during prayer by asking questions of the passage that included listening for instruction from the Lord, thanksgiving, confession and petition.<sup>136</sup> Though Luther did not term his method *lectio divina*, it is obviously similar. Since Luther had previously been a monk, and probably practiced *lectio divina* on a daily basis, it is not surprising that he would recommend to all believers this fourfold way to pray and approach the Word.

John Calvin describes prayer as a familiar conversation with God. In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin may have adapted *lectio divina* into his approach to prayer. Like Benedict's *Rule*, he suggests for saints to follow "four rules" when praying. He begins stating these rules by proclaiming:

Let this be the first rule: that we be disposed in mind and heart as befits those who enter conversation with God. This we shall indeed attain with respect to the mind if it is freed from carnal cares and thoughts by which it can be called or led away from right and pure contemplation of God, and then not only devotes itself completely to prayer but also, in so far as this is possible, is lifted and carried beyond itself.<sup>137</sup>

Calvin asserted those rules as follows:

1. *First Rule*: Pray with reverence.
2. *Second Rule*: Pray from a sincere sense of want, and with penitence.

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<sup>135</sup>Archie Parrish, *Luther's Letter to a Friend Sharing: A Simple Way to Pray* (Marietta, GA: Serve International, Inc., 2005), 19.

<sup>136</sup>Ibid., 33.

<sup>137</sup>John Calvin, "Prayer, Which is the Chief Exercise of Faith, and by Which We Daily Receive God's Benefits," in *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1960), 21:853.

3. *Third Rule:* Yield all confidence in ourselves and humbly plead for pardon.
4. *Fourth Rule:* Pray with confident hope.<sup>138</sup>

Within these “rules,” Calvin regularly refers to using Scriptures to meditatively pray, which echoes the principles of the spiritual practice of *lectio divina*.

Like Luther and Calvin, the founder of the Methodist movement taught believers to pray the Word. John Wesley (1703-1791), a Protestant, used a similar approach to *lectio divina*. He taught using Scripture as a guide to pray and developed *morning* and *evening* prayers.<sup>139</sup> Wesley advocated “listening to the text” when reading the Word of God. He believed the Word speaks to those who approach the Word of God with anticipation that they will hear from God. In *John Wesley: How to Read the Scripture*, he suggests choosing a Scripture from the OT and NT to pray. He says, “Serious and earnest prayer should be constantly used, before we consult the oracles of God, seeing ‘Scripture can only be understood thro’ the same Spirit whereby it was given.’ Our reading should likewise be closed with prayer, that what we read may be written on our heart.”<sup>140</sup>

In 1957 Jean Leclercq, a Roman Catholic Benedictine monk, wrote and spoke publicly from a platform about the importance of *lectio divina*. In his book, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*,<sup>141</sup> Leclercq raised appreciation for *lectio divina* and

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<sup>138</sup>Calvin, “Prayer,” 850-863.

<sup>139</sup>See Nolan B. Harmon, Jr., *The Rites and Ritual of Episcopal Methodism* (Nashville, TN: Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, 1995).

<sup>140</sup>United Methodist Women, “John Wesley: How to Read Scripture,” <http://gbgmu.org/umw/wesley/bible.stm> (accessed March 3, 2013).

<sup>141</sup>See Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: a Study of Monastic Culture*, trans. Catherine Misrahi, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 1982).

promoted it to Christians who were seeking to improve their prayer life.<sup>142</sup> Through his teaching and positive public response, Leclercq resuscitated the systematic use of *lectio divina*.

The Roman Catholic Church supported Leclercq and promoted *lectio divina* in Vatican II (1963-1965). In 2005, Pope Benedict XVI spoke to participants in the International Congress Organized to Commemorate the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation “*Dei Verbum*.<sup>143</sup>” This document recognized the central place of the Scriptures in Christian life and recovered a vital practice in Christian spirituality by encouraging people to read, once again, in the ancient way of prayer, *lectio divina*. During his speech, the Pope said:

I would like in particular to recall and recommend the ancient tradition of *lectio divina*: the diligent reading of Sacred Scripture accompanied by prayer that brings about that intimate dialogue in which the person reading hears God who is speaking, and in praying, responds to him with trusting openness of heart (cf. *Dei Verbum*, n. 25). If it is effectively promoted, this practice will bring to the Church—I am convinced of it—a new spiritual springtime. As a strong point of biblical ministry, *lectio divina* should therefore be increasingly encouraged, also through the use of new methods, carefully thought through and in step with the times.<sup>144</sup>

*Lectio divina* embraces thinking intellectually when reading the Word of God, but also understands that immersion in the Word of God is not merely an exercise for head knowledge. Instead, the Word is a key component that transforms and changes individual lives, and leads to repentance, dependence, and trust in God. Transformation takes place

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<sup>142</sup>Raymond Studzinski, *Reading to Live: The Evolving Practice of Lectio Divina* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 192-193.

<sup>143</sup>Ibid., 193.

<sup>144</sup>Pope Benedict XVI, *Speeches* (September 16, 2005), [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speeches/2005/september/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20050916\\_40-dei-verbum\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2005/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20050916_40-dei-verbum_en.html) (accessed March 8, 2013).

not only in the mind, but also in the heart, allowing individuals to become more Christ-like. The Church's rediscovery of, and instruction on, *lectio divina* has birthed new vitality in the lives of both Roman Catholic and Protestant believers who have adopted the practice. Studzinski asserts,

*Lectio divina*, especially when done with the Scriptures, enjoys in this twenty-first century a place of prominence among practices of Christian spirituality across denominational lines. Because of its transformative power it deserves such recognition. As a result of the practice of *lectio* people find themselves feeling, imagining, thinking, and acting differently. They acquire the “mind of Christ” and are readied to transform the world as Christ did. The power of the practice to change people is amazing.<sup>145</sup>

A daily practice of *lectio divina* would undoubtedly impact believers in the modern era. Many believers have been culturally-desensitized to the importance of stopping to think, to meditate, or to spend time in focused prayer, and they are suffering because of it. The practice of *lectio divina* is a necessary prescription for the modern Church, and its re-discovery and adoption into daily practice can renew minds and transform behavior in ways that bring restoration to individuals and those with whom they come into contact. In order to reflect God's image in the world, which is their highest calling, believers must choose to engage in practices, like *lectio divina*, that produce transformation from the inside out.

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<sup>145</sup>Studzinski, 200.

## Theological Foundation

God expressed the unique position and role of humans over the rest of His creation by “creat[ing] man in His own image and likeness” (Gen. 1:26-27).<sup>146</sup> In the beginning, Adam and Eve lived out this nature in perfect communion with God, which yielded righteous and holy living. Eventually, however, they encountered temptation in the Garden of Eden and chose to disobey God, putting the exercise of their free will over remaining in perfect fellowship with their Creator. This fall into sin initiated all of humanity, though still made in the image of God, into a state where that perfect communion with God is broken, and where, without a method of redemption, the result is death, or separation from God. The OT sacrificial system, which provided a way for believers to be cleansed from their unrighteousness, foreshadowed humanity’s ultimate redemption found in Jesus Christ’s life, death, and resurrection. In Christ, believers regain fellowship with their Creator and are capable of being transformed, by the power of the Holy Spirit, into the image of God.

The spiritual practice of *lectio divina*—which is proposed in this project as an effective discipline for renewing thought patterns that are in conflict with biblical teaching, as well as transforming corresponding external behaviors—presupposes that because of Christ’s ultimately redemptive work, believers can fulfill their original calling, which is to reflect the character of God in thought, word, and deed to the rest of creation.

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<sup>146</sup>The word human refers to both males and females because God created every human in his image. The common word used, man, also refers to females throughout this paper. See both Genesis 1:27 and 5:1-2.

## The Doctrine of Humanity

The *doctrine of humanity*, also called anthropology, is an area of Christian theology that studies various topics related to mankind based on the teaching of Scripture. The theological foundation for the spiritual practice of *lectio divina* is rooted in the *doctrine of humanity*. This doctrine maintains the following:

- Man is created in God's image. (Gen. 1:26-27)
- Man is a fallen creature (Rom. 5:12) and is born in a corrupt state.
- Man has a material aspect, the body, and a non-material aspect, the spirit. (Jas. 2:26)
- Though marred by the Fall, man retains remnants of God's image in His non-material nature. (Gen. 9:6)<sup>147</sup>

Some differentiate the soul from the spirit of man resulting in a trichotomous view of his nature, "body, soul, and spirit" (1 Thes. 5:23). Others see the soul as essentially synonymous with the spirit, resulting in a dichotomous view of man's nature (material and immaterial), which may be expressed as either body and soul, or, body and spirit (Heb. 4:12; 1 Cor. 14:14; Matt. 10:28).

In every generation, people seek explanations about their position and role on earth in their quest for identity and self-understanding by asking questions such as, "Who am I?", "Where did I come from?", and "What is my purpose?" Christianity answers these questions by clearly defining human identity and purpose: humans are creatures of God, made in His image and likeness, and were created for fellowship with Him and to

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<sup>147</sup><http://www.theopedia.com/Humanity>, in *Theopedia: An Encyclopedia of Christianity* (accessed March 8, 2013).

reflect His character to the world.<sup>148</sup> As created beings, humans are dependent on God for all things.

The Hebrew words for “image” (*tselem*) and “likeness” (*demut*) are synonymous, both referring in the Old Testament to a statue or idol. *An Introduction to Christian Theology* explains the connection between the meaning of these words and humanity’s purpose on earth: A *tselem* could refer to a monument crafted in the likeness of an ancient near-eastern king that would be set up in and at the borders of his domain in order to identify his claim of dominion.<sup>149</sup> This is the ruler of this kingdom (Dan. 3). By analogy, Gerhard von Rad points out “the King of heaven and earth places a divine image or *tselem* in creation—humanity: ‘Just as powerful earthly kings, to indicate their claims to dominion, erect an image of themselves in the provinces of their empire where they do not personally appear, so man is placed upon earth in God’s image as God’s sovereign emblem.’”<sup>150</sup> Humanity, fashioned in God’s likeness, thus reflects and represents God in creation in some special, royal way—declaring the earth to be God’s kingdom. This is in all likelihood why there is a prescription against physical representation or likenesses of God in Israelite law (Deut. 5:8). God already has an image, a divine likeness in creation—humanity. Human beings are God’s living statues on the earth, bearing God’s likeness, declaring that the “earth is the LORD’s and all that is in it” (Ps. 24:1).<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>148</sup>Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1998), 484.

<sup>149</sup>Richard J. Plantinga, Thomas R. Thompson, and Matthew D. Lundberg, *an Introduction to Christian Theology* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 184.

<sup>150</sup>Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: a Commentary*, trans. John H. Marks (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1972), 60.

<sup>151</sup>Plantinga, 184.

The entire human race owes its beginning and continued existence to the will and work of God, who chose to create because of His love.<sup>152</sup> In *Early Christian Doctrines*, J. N. D. Kelly states,

[God] enabled [humans] to participate in His Word, thereby making him in His image. This communion with the Word bestowed supernatural knowledge upon him, made him rational, and gave him incorruption and immortality. But to preserve this resemblance or likeness to God, it was necessary for him to contemplate the Word without remission, and so God placed him in Paradise, giving him a special law to steady His will. . . . Man's primitive state was thus one of supernatural blessedness; here we see the idea of original righteousness and perfection in embryo.<sup>153</sup>

Humans, therefore, can ground their personhood, including their value and dignity, in their resemblance to the Creator and in their purpose for living, which is to glorify God by their love and care for all of creation.<sup>154</sup> The psalmist, David, acknowledged the wonder of man's role and purpose on this earth:

What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet. (Ps. 8:4-6)

During the fourth and fifth centuries, Church Fathers began to analyze man's sinful condition in contrast with his God-given position as a divine image-bearer and steward of the rest of creation. They questioned how it could be that humans have a propensity to sin when they are, even after the fall, created in the image of God, as well as how humans, despite their sin nature, are still able to reflect the likeness of God.

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<sup>152</sup>Plantinga, 184.

<sup>153</sup>J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York, NY: Harper Brothers Publishers, 1958), 346.

<sup>154</sup>Colin E. Gunton, *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 163.

The doctrine of humanity hints that being made in God's image and likeness gives one the capacity to live in accordance with Scripture's most central command: to love and serve God and others, as well as to obey God and to enjoy a relationship and fellowship with him. It is also the qualities of God within humans—their intelligence, will, and emotions—that enable them to worship, interact with other humans, work, and rule over creation:

Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.’ (Gen. 1:26-28)

As God is the Lord over all of creation, humans reflect the image and likeness of God by ruling and exercising dominion over the rest of his creation, for its good, and for the welfare of others.<sup>155</sup> It is important to note God's character in these passages of Scripture. It says, “God blessed them.” Since God *blessed* humans, humans reflect His likeness by being a *blessing* to others.

Like the Old Testament, the New Testament attests to humans being made in God's likeness and image and instructs them, in essence, to bless others by being an extension of God's character to them. In James 3:9 the author condemns the use of the same tongue to praise God and then to curse humans who have been made in the likeness of God. This verse implies, therefore, that simply being made in the image of God does not necessitate godly behavior. Romans 8:29 notes that believers are being conformed to the image of the Son: “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to

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<sup>155</sup>Erickson, 528.

the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.” Likewise, 2 Corinthians 3:18 says, “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” Both of these passages allude to the ongoing nature of being conformed to the character of God, which yields behavior more reflective of His nature.

And in Ephesians 4:23-24, Paul urges his readers “to be made new in the attitude of your minds and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.” Finally, Colossians 3:10 also refers to putting on “the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator,” suggesting that salvation does not simply enable a person to modify his or her behavior, but to actually become a new creation who is fully equipped to increasingly reflect the image and likeness of God.

### **The Image of God in History**

Throughout history, philosophers and theologians have formulated opinions that reflect the doctrine of humanity. Irenaeus (A.D. 130-202) believed that a human being possesses an immortal soul that is united with a mortal body.<sup>156</sup> Though he conceded that man is created in the image and likeness of God, Irenaeus distinguished “image” and “likeness” as two separate terms, rather than seeing them as synonymous. In his view, the *image* of God in man is reflected in humanity’s natural capacities and primarily involves the immortal soul’s rationality and freedom.<sup>157</sup> He believed that God’s image remains in humanity, even after the fall.

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<sup>156</sup>Plantinga, 186.

<sup>157</sup>Ibid.

Irenaeus defines *likeness* to God, on the other hand, as humanity's original righteousness and special relationship with God. According to Irenaeus, this supernatural endowment was lost as a result of the fall into sin and stands in need of restoration, which takes place through the incarnation of Christ, who is the exact image and likeness of God. Irenaeus explains that in addition to the body and the rational soul, believers in Christ also possess the “spirit,” a dimension that is an endowment of the Holy Spirit and restores the likeness of God only to redeemed human beings.<sup>158</sup>

In his discussion of creation in the *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) claims that the image of God is found chiefly in intellectual creatures who most image God when they reflect *divine* self-understanding and love.<sup>159</sup> He believed that the rational soul is the locus of the image of God. Additionally, Aquinas understood that the higher the creature’s intellect, the more completely the image of God is present. For example, he argued that the image of God is found more perfectly in angels than in humans because angels have a superior intellectual nature. He believed the image of God is present in all humans, but the degree to which they can know and love God varies:

- The minds of all humans have a capacity to understand and love God that is unaffected by sin.
- The “just” know and love God to the degree to which they are being restored in the divine image through Christ.
- Humans who have gone to glory know and love God perfectly by virtue of their participation in the contemplation of the divine essence or nature of God.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>158</sup>Plantinga, 186.

<sup>159</sup>Ibid., 187.

<sup>160</sup>Ibid.

In this understanding, Aquinas affirms that all humans bear the image of God even after the fall into sin, but qualifies believers in Christ as able to bear the image of God more purely, a capacity that enables them to live as God intends.

Reformation theologians Martin Luther and John Calvin had similar understandings about humans bearing the image of God. Both emphasized that man's original righteousness embodied the complete image of God. However, Adam and Eve's fall into sin damaged and perverted the image, without destroying it entirely. Luther explained that the original relationship between God and man, which was lost by Adam, was restored fully by Christ, making it possible for humans, through Christ, to reflect God's image to the world. Calvin believed that humans can gain a clearer understanding of the divine image of God by looking at the second Adam, Jesus Christ, who is the proper image of God. When the divine image is seen in Christ, humans gain true knowledge of God and realize "pure righteousness and holiness" in living.<sup>161</sup> In *Created in God's Image*, Hoekema says:

Because our first parents failed in this first covenant, God graciously made a second covenant with humankind, the *covenant of grace*. In the second covenant Christ, the new head, not only suffered the punishment for the sin of Adam and Eve and the sins of the descendants, but also rendered to God the perfect obedience that Adam and Eve failed to render, thus earning for all who belong to Christ eternal life.<sup>162</sup>

Through Christ's life and death on the cross, God reconciled the world to Himself and liberated humanity from its bondage to sin, death, and all other evil powers that threaten

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<sup>161</sup>Plantinga, 187.

<sup>162</sup>Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 118.

to ruin God's good creation.<sup>163</sup> Contemplation and acceptance of Christ's work initiates redemptive salvation in the life of the believer, enabling him to die to his old nature and, instead, to take on the identity of Christ. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in *Act and Being*, says that "being in Christ, being-directed to Christ, makes existence free."<sup>164</sup> This freedom not only disentangles believers from the bondage of sin and death, but also enables them to live renewed lives that reflect the character of God.

### **Christian Transformation**

When Romans 12:2 exhorts: "Be transformed by the renewal of your *mind*," this is not a theoretical re-learning, but the *renewal* of the will (which could be translated "character").<sup>165</sup> This means that once humans choose to follow Christ, they need to allow their character to change, to be *transformed* to be more Christ-like. The assumption in this verse is that man is able to respond in obedience to this command, that it is an act of will. Bultmann, in *Theology of the New Testament*, explains

that being 'man' means being a specific 'self' that is the subject of its own willing and doing, [and] is perhaps most clearly expressed by the term *nous*, usually translated 'mind' or 'understanding.' By it is meant not the mind or the intellect as a special faculty, but the knowing, understanding, and judging which belong to man . . . determining what attitude he adopts.<sup>166</sup>

God gives humans the ability to choose whether or not they will obey His commands and expects that believers, because of the birth of their new nature at salvation, will choose to

<sup>163</sup> Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 165.

<sup>164</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being* (Minneapolis, MN: Ausburg Fortress, 1996), 2:40.

<sup>165</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), 211.

<sup>166</sup>Ibid.

become who they are in Christ. Paul encouraged believers to “put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph. 4:24). This implies that holiness and righteousness, the fundamental attributes of God, must be the chief attributes of his image reflected in believers in Christ.<sup>167</sup>

So, how do believers who desire their lives to reflect the likeness of God nurture the renewal and transformation of their minds? Throughout his writings, Paul declares that it is by a combination of the Holy Spirit, prayer, and the Word of God. In Acts 1:8, Jesus proclaimed that “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you,” which means that followers of Christ have been given an enabling power from God to become more righteous and holy. First Corinthians 2:12-13 says, “Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.” Verse 16 says, “‘For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?’ But *we have the mind of Christ.*” The Holy Spirit is a gift given to enable believers to discern and desire the will of God, and to be increasingly transformed by it.

In addition to the role of the Holy Spirit, Paul contends that prayer is also vital to the transformation of the believer’s mind and actions. He prays expectantly that the saints’ “love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that [they] may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ” (Phil. 1:9-10), which illustrates his understanding that prayer is an agent of change. Prayer is a concrete expression of love and devotion to God<sup>168</sup> and demonstrates

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<sup>167</sup>Emery H. Bancroft, *Christian Theology: Systematic and Biblical* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1964), 180.

<sup>168</sup>Migliore, 179.

believers' recognition of God's sovereignty, as well as their great need for His intervention in daily life. Jesus modeled for believers an active prayer life in which He demonstrated both His understanding of the Father's authority and His willingness to obey Him (Mark 14:32-42). He also taught believers how to pray in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6:9-13), solidifying the importance of the practice in daily living. It is through regular prayer that believers position themselves for the opportunity to experience change, renewal, and transformation into the image and likeness of Christ.

Finally, Paul commands believers to utilize "the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God" (Eph. 6:17) so that they might live, despite the sin around them, in a way that reflects God's image to the world. In *Habits of the Mind: Intellectual Life as a Christian Calling*, James Sire asserts, "When the text of a great work fully engages the mind, when the reader is so completely occupied with what is being read, the world of the text becomes the world of the reader."<sup>169</sup> In other words, when a person reads a "great work," like the Word of God, it directs his or her thinking, which then changes his or her actions. Hebrews 4:12 says, "For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." The Word of God, read under the direction of the Holy Spirit, is vital to re-programming thoughts and transforming a Christian's character.

These three necessary ingredients for transformation—the Holy Spirit, prayer, and the Word of God—are also the three pillars of the spiritual practice of *lectio divina*,

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<sup>169</sup>James Sire, *Habits of the Mind: Intellectual Life as a Christian Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 148.

which holds that a prayerful reading of Scripture, while inspired by the Holy Spirit, can renew the minds and change the actions of believers, enabling them to reflect more closely the image of God to the world around them.

### **Christocentric Method**

The theological foundation for the spiritual practice of *lectio divina* is also supported by the Christocentric Method, which is a way of approaching and interpreting Scripture that maintains Jesus Christ as the focus.<sup>170</sup> In this approach, all of Scripture is viewed as a narrative of *saving history*. This view identifies all of the events and figures in the OT as “types” that point toward a Savior who will redeem and transform mankind.<sup>171</sup> The NT introduces the Savior as Jesus Christ, who came in the flesh and fulfilled God’s covenant with humankind. The entire trajectory of Christ’s life—His incarnation, ministry on earth, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension to heaven—is understood as the culmination of Scripture’s narrative of saving history. In Christ, humankind has been ultimately redeemed and transformed.

Karl Barth (1886-1968) is the theologian most closely associated with the Christocentric Method. He believed that proper interpretation of Scripture requires reading it on two different levels: one straightforward and the other Christological—how it fits into the larger narrative of the final, redemptive work of Jesus Christ.<sup>172</sup> Since Christ is understood to be both the beginning and completion of all the ways and works

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<sup>170</sup>Cornelius Van Til, *Barth’s Christology* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1962), 10.

<sup>171</sup>Ibid.

<sup>172</sup>Ibid., 12.

of God, the entirety of Scripture must be interpreted as having a hidden Christological center.

Additionally, Barth recognized Christ as the primary relation of God to mankind. He explained that God made accessible His redemptive Presence through His coexistence with man in the person of Jesus. In so doing, He (because of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ) transforms humans through their participation with His divine being.<sup>173</sup> Through Christ, man can inherit the character of God and begin to live according to His will.

T. F. Torrance concurs, “Christian knowledge of God arises out of the self-revelation of God in and through Jesus Christ, for in Him the Word of God has become man in the midst of man’s estrangement from God, committing Himself to human understanding and creating communion between man and God.”<sup>174</sup> Torrance understood the redemptive plan of God, the reestablishment of right relationship between humans and their Creator, was executed and completed through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is only through Christ that believers can know God and experience the transformation that springs from right relationship with Him.

## Conclusion

In order to experience truly transformed lives, believers must move beyond intellectual acceptance of Christ’s work on the cross. Instead, they must be willing to allow themselves to be transformed through the empowering work of the Holy Spirit, the

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<sup>173</sup>Van Til, 88.

<sup>174</sup>T. F. Torrance, “The Place of Christology in Biblical and Dogmatic Theology,” in *Essays in Christiology for Karl Barth*, ed. Thomas Henry Lewis Parker (London, UK: Lutterworth Press, 1956), 13.

reading of God's Word, and diligent prayer. The regular practice of these spiritual disciplines will transform a person so that he or she more completely reflects the holiness and righteousness of God. Additionally, the traditional practice called *lectio divina* is beneficial and empowering for believers in Christ. The practice of *lectio divina* assumes humanity's continual struggle with sin, but also recognizes the ability of humans, who are made in the image of God, to experience continual transformation of mind and behavior when they systematically engage in the meditative reading of Scripture. Through this practice, humans can experience freedom from thought patterns and behaviors that are in conflict with the teaching of Scripture and are gradually conformed into the image of Christ. Though a traditional practice, modern believers may find great benefit in adding the practice of *lectio divina* to their daily lives.

When believers choose to incorporate the practice of *lectio divina* into their daily walks with God, they are acknowledging humanity's continual need to be renewed and restored through Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit so that they can live according to God's will for their lives. They expect the Word of God to speak to them and believe that their lives can conform more and more to the image and likeness of God. Though this transformation can and will occur in the life of the individual believer, it is the transformation of believers collectively—the Church—that will have the greatest impact on the world. For when the Church reflects the true character of God, the world takes notice and is changed.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Research Design**

This chapter will illuminate the design and methodology implemented in the field experience of this research project. The field experience was conducted in three different locations in Branson, Missouri, including an office in a pregnancy crisis center, a chapel, and a home. The participants included eight people from diverse backgrounds. All participants were Christian, but were from various segments of the Church including Protestant denominations and non-denominations, and Catholic. Their ages ranged from 44-75. The facilitator of this project was a Christian Bible communicator, Bible study teacher, radio broadcast preacher, ordained minister, and certified teacher.

The participants in this project have struggled with thought patterns that are in conflict with what the Bible teaches about God, others, or themselves, and their words and actions are reflective of this internal conflict.<sup>1</sup> The hypothesis was that women who experience these types of struggles would experience renewal of the mind and transformation of behavior through the practice of *lectio divina*, the “divine reading of Scripture,” during the course of the project timeline.

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<sup>1</sup>Romans 8:5-6 illuminates the struggle between acting according to the flesh because the mind is set on what the flesh desires, versus those who live in accordance with the Spirit, with the mind set on what the Spirit desires. Verse 6 says: The mind set on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.

The anticipated results involve a change or transformation in thought patterns and behaviors to align with Scripture. The participants engaging in *lectio divina* are predicted to experience transformative change from: (a) fear toward peacefulness, (b) pride toward humility, (c) anxiety toward comfort and reassurance, (d) anger toward contentment, (e) worry toward reassurance, (f) uncontrolled words toward controlled words, (g) a lack of faith toward security and trust in the Lord, (h) undisciplined behavior toward obedience, (i) selfishness toward selflessness.<sup>2</sup>

The eight participants consisted of three groups meeting in three different locations for eight weeks. Group one met in an office in a pregnancy crisis center with two participants. Group two met at a chapel with two participants. Group three met at a home beginning with seven participants, but ending with four. For organizational purposes, each participant was given a folder containing paper for weekly journal entries, as well as pre and post-tests surveys. As lessons were taught, each participant was given a handout to take home with the information included.<sup>3</sup> The project began with a six week schedule, but because it was obvious that more analysis was needed for accuracy, the meetings expanded to eight weeks.

The purpose for the meetings was to teach the participants the spiritual practice of *lectio divina*, to practice it as a group, and then for the participants to practice it at home. The lecture schedule is as follows:

Pre-Meeting	One-on-one entrance interviews
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<sup>2</sup>The struggles and changes listed are those of the participants in this study. For this study to be replicated, the inquirer/researcher must adjust according to the primary areas of struggles for those who participate.

<sup>3</sup>See Appendix B, I, and J.

Week 1	Introduction to Project “Romans 12:2 & <i>Lectio Divina</i> ” Participant Survey—Pre-Test
Week 2	“Renew Your Mind” Four Steps of <i>Lectio Divina</i> Practiced Collectively—Philippians 4:2-9
Week 3	“Encounter Scripture with all Five Senses” <i>Lectio Divina</i> Practiced Collectively—1 John 1:1-10 Assignment #1 for Individual <i>Lectio Divina</i>
Week 4	“Receive the Mind of Christ” <i>Lectio Divina</i> Practiced Collectively—1 Corinthians 2:9-16 Assignment #2 for Individual <i>Lectio Divina</i>
Week 5	“Flesh Verses Spirit” <i>Lectio Divina</i> Practiced Collectively—Galatians 3:1-14 Assignment #3 for Individual <i>Lectio Divina</i>
Week 6	“Made in the Image of God” <i>Lectio Divina</i> Practiced Collectively—Genesis 1:26-31 Assignment #4 Individual <i>Lectio Divina</i> —Participants chose their own set of Scriptures to practice <i>lectio divina</i> pertaining to their area of struggle.
Week 7	“Purpose to Meditate and Pray Scripture—Joshua 1:8” <i>Lectio Divina</i> Practiced Collectively— A participant chose the set of Scriptures for <i>lectio divina</i> and led the group. Participant chosen Scriptures: Group 1: Philippians 3:7-21 Group 2: 2 Corinthians 3:17-4:18 Group 3: Ephesians 5:8-14 Assignment #5 Individual <i>Lectio Divina</i> —Participants chose their own set of Scriptures to practice <i>lectio divina</i> pertaining to their area of struggle.
Week 8	“Peace and Transformation—Isaiah 26:3-9” <i>Lectio Divina</i> Practiced Collectively—A participant chose the set of Scriptures for <i>lectio divina</i> and led the group Participant Post-Test Participant chosen Scriptures: Group 1: Luke 18:1-8 Group 2: Matthew 6:5-8 Group 3: Luke 11:5-13

Post-Meeting	One-on-one exit interview
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Prior to the first week of teaching and practicing *lectio divina*, each participant was interviewed privately and individually to find out if she had one personal area of struggle she would like to change. I wanted to discover if a change would occur by practicing *lectio divina* during the course of the project. Every participant expressed that they had an area needing change.

At the beginning of the first group meeting, week one, each participant was given a pre-test survey. This will compare to a post-test survey, given during week eight, with the same questions. On the onset of week two, the participants were taught the four steps of *lectio divina*. During week three, each participant agreed to practice *lectio divina* for three weeks at home using Scriptures I prescribed that pertained to their area of struggle. These were home assignments one, two, and three, and occurred during weeks three, four, and five. Following the home assignments, the participants chose their own two sets of Scriptures to practice *lectio divina* at home. These were home assignments four and five, and occurred during weeks six and seven. This means that each individual practiced *lectio divina* at home—home assignments one through five—with five different sets of Scriptures that pertained to her area of struggle for five weeks. The final two weeks of group meetings, weeks seven and eight, a volunteer participant led the group meeting. The participant who led the group meeting during weeks seven and eight chose the set of Scriptures that were meditated upon using *lectio divina*. During the final meeting, week eight, the participants were given a post-treatment survey to elicit whether practicing *lectio divina* contributed to a change in their areas of struggle.

Lessons and Scripture were taught pertaining to *lectio divina*, mind renewal, encountering Scripture with all five senses, receiving the mind of Christ, flesh verses spirit, being made in the image of God, the purpose of meditating on and praying Scripture, and peace and transformation.<sup>4</sup> A pre-test survey was distributed at the first meeting to extract information from the participants about their habits of reading, praying, and meditating on Scripture.<sup>5</sup>

### **Research Methodology**

The strategy for inquiry or research methodology for this project is qualitative in nature. A case study model and a proactive research method were implemented.

According to *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, “Qualitative research is a form of interpretive inquiry in which researchers make an interpretation of what they see, hear, and understand. Their interpretations cannot be separated from their own backgrounds, history, contexts, and prior understandings.”<sup>6</sup> This type of research method is described by William R. Myers as one in which the researcher intentionally engages in qualitative research while proactively helping participants change and transform.<sup>7</sup> In this method, the researcher is passionately

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<sup>4</sup>See Appendix B.

<sup>5</sup>See Appendix C.

<sup>6</sup>John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2009), 176.

<sup>7</sup>William R. Myers, *Research in Ministry: A Primer for the Doctor of Ministry Program* (Chicago, IL: Exploration Press, 1993), 29.

involved with the practice being evaluated.<sup>8</sup> The desired transformation is specific to each participant according to her area of struggle.<sup>9</sup>

### **Instrumentation for Data Collection**

In order to establish the validity of the research, methodological triangulation was implemented. This allowed information and data collected to be more accurate because the participants were observed and tested from several different angles. The instruments used included pre- and post-test surveys, one-on-one interviews, and participant journaling. The instruments were created by the researcher of this project. Copies of these are located in the appendix.

#### *Participant Pre- and Post-Test Surveys*

The first type of instrument that I employed for evaluative data collection was a participant pre-test survey.<sup>10</sup> This was designed to acquire information from the participants about their habits regarding reading, meditating, and praying Scripture. Their understanding of *lectio divina* was also investigated. Following the eight week program, a post-test survey was administered to evaluate changes, progress/non-progress, and

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<sup>8</sup>Myers, 29.

<sup>9</sup>The anticipated results shall involve a change in thought patterns and behaviors to be in alignment with Scripture. The outcome shall result in a renewed mind and transformation that align with Scripture. The movement toward change will be specific for each participant. The participants in this study were anticipated to move from fear toward peace, from pride toward humility, from anxiety toward comfort and reassurance, from anger toward contentment, from worry toward reassurance, from uncontrolled words toward controlled words, from a lack of faith toward security and trust in the Lord, from undisciplined behavior toward obedience, and selfishness toward selflessness.

<sup>10</sup>See Appendix E.

reflection about *lectio divina*.<sup>11</sup> The surveys were used to ascertain what was learned during the eight weeks and to evaluate changes in thought patterns or behavior after practicing *lectio divina*. The pre-test was administered during the first meeting, and the post-test during the last meeting.

### *One-On-One Entrance/Exit Interviews*

The second type of instrument that I utilized to collect evaluative data was one-on-one entrance/exit interviewing.<sup>12</sup> The purpose of the interviews was to identify where the participant struggles in either thought patterns and/or behaviors that misalign with Scripture and to evaluate if a change occurred in one area of struggle at the end of her participation in this project.

After entrance interviews, I prescribed each participant with a set of Scriptures pertaining to her area of struggle. Each participant used the set of Scriptures to practice *lectio divina* individually outside our meetings. The participants did this for three weeks with a different set of Scriptures assigned each week. During the following two weeks, participants replicated this process by choosing their own sets of Scriptures pertaining to their areas of struggle. This means that each participant practiced *lectio divina* individually pertaining to their area of struggle for five weeks.

Exit interviews were conducted to gather information about each participant's growth during the eight week study. The interview also allowed me to evaluate if the participant had changed and improved in an area she desired to change. Her

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<sup>11</sup>See Appendix G.

<sup>12</sup>See Appendix C and D.

understanding of *lectio divina* was explored, as well as her capability to replicate and teach it to others. A copy of the one-on-one entrance/exit interview questions can be found in Appendix C and D.

### *Participant Journaling*

Participant journaling was the third instrument used for collection of data. Each participant was given a folder with paper included in it for journaling at the end of each meeting. This allowed me to gain the perspective of the participant including their thoughts about *lectio divina* and if engaging in its practice was beneficial and life changing. Many of the participant's journal entries are reported in Chapter 5.

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

Analysis and interpretation of the data followed the six steps outlined in Creswell's *Research Design*.<sup>13</sup> Step one involved organizing and preparing the data for analysis.<sup>14</sup> As data was collected, the participant's responses to the questionnaires and surveys were entered into the computer, and responses were charted. The one-on-one interviews were evaluated and sorted by type and categories.

The second step involved reading through all the data with the intent of getting a general sense of the data.<sup>15</sup> The data was read through several times in order to increase

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<sup>13</sup>Creswell, 181-189.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 185.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

understanding. During this process, general ideas stood out, and themes emerged to conclude the data's overall meaning.

During the third step, a coding process began.<sup>16</sup> Rossman and Rallis describe coding the data as the process of organizing the material into chunks or segments of text before bringing meaning to information.<sup>17</sup> Major themes and ideas began to emerge which allowed me to begin to organize and categorize the analysis.

General themes, descriptions, and categories became visible during the fourth step of the coding process.<sup>18</sup> Those were evaluated and detailed information was generated that was pertinent to the overall analysis.

Step five provided how the description and themes will be represented in the qualitative narrative.<sup>19</sup> This includes interpretation of the data and findings of the study which are displayed in a combination of narration and visuals, figures, and tables.

Creswell's sixth and final step includes making an interpretation or meaning of the data.<sup>20</sup> The data was analyzed and interpreted and the findings of this study were determined.

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<sup>16</sup>Creswell, 186.

<sup>17</sup>Gretchen B. Rossman and Sharon F. Rallis, *Learning in the Field: An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2011), 171.

<sup>18</sup>Creswell, 189.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

**Validity, Credibility, Transferability, and Dependability**

Numerous steps were taken to ascertain validity of the analysis obtained in this project. The participants were also assessed to indicate the credibility of this project. Each individual was given the opportunity to express her ideas on a survey questions about the credibility of this project. Every participant conveyed 100 percent credibility.

Transferability and dependability of this project is based upon whether the information can be taught and analyzed in another place and setting. Because details were expressed and thorough descriptions of each step were projected to the reader, I believe this project is transferable and easily replicable in another setting.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **FIELD EXPERIENCE**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to elucidate the analysis found in this project's field experience and to report the outcomes. Included are weekly reports, participant reviews, and pre/post-test survey questions and results. The data collected was qualitative in nature and triangulated with three tools of discovery applied to each participant: *pre* and *post-test surveys*, *one-on-one interviews*, and *journaling*. Wolcott describes qualitative research as providing a broader spectrum of the key issues which may have been missed otherwise, and then determining which information is most useful.<sup>1</sup> McNiff and Whitehead comment on triangulating the data: "Once the data have been triangulated, therefore, you are in a good position to begin searching and analyzing the data, interpreting them, and selecting those pieces that show the realization of values."<sup>2</sup> The surveys were used to determine pre and post knowledge of the material presented, the one-on-one entrance/exit interviews were applied to evaluate changes, and journaling was allocated to illuminate each participant's thoughts about the subject matter.

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<sup>1</sup>Harry F. Wolcott, *Writing up Qualitative Research*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing, 2009), 82.

<sup>2</sup>Jean McNiff and Jack Whitehead, *You and Your Action Research Project*, 3rd ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010), 179.

Three different groups met over an eight week time period in three different locations, in the city of Branson, Missouri. Each group was unique and had its own personality. Group one met at a Christian pregnancy crisis center. Two women attended and participated in these sessions. We met in one of the participant's office. Group two met at a home of one of the attendees. This group began with six women and one man. Group three met at a citywide prayer chapel open to the public. This group included two women who volunteer with me at my local church.

The plan for this project began with one small group, women only, meeting for six weeks. One week before I would implement my project, individuals outside this group asked if they could participate in my project. After evaluation and prayer, I decided to add those individuals believing that this would add variety, as well as increase accuracy and validity. This formed two additional groups. After the first week, it was obvious that my projection to implement this project over a six week period needed to increase to eight weeks. The two additional weeks would allow more time for important information to be presented and would substantiate the analysis. This would also allow more time for the participants to practice *lectio divina* on the areas of struggle they are trying to overcome.

The first week began with a total of eleven participants. After the first week, two participants, a married couple, dropped out indicating that their schedule had changed. During the fifth week, one female dropped out because she felt like she needed to be at home to deal with family issues. The participants who completed the eight-week project included eight participants, all female. The participants' ages ranged from 44 to 75 years

old. All participants were Christian church-goers, but were from various segments of the Church including Protestant denominations and non-denominations, as well as Catholic.

## **Weekly Reports**

### *Pre-Meeting*

Prior to our group meeting, private one-on-one interviews were given with each participant.<sup>3</sup> The purpose of the interview was to find out an area of weakness or struggle that the individual deals with on a regular basis. After the interview, I spent a few days praying and searching Scripture in order to find what I believed were the best Scriptures to assign to the participant to practice *lectio divina* on her own outside of our meeting time. This will be a *lectio divina* home assignment that will begin week 3.

### *Week 1*

The meeting began with Romans 12:2 introduced as the underlining Scriptural focus for this project. Each participant was given ten questions to answer in a pre-test survey.<sup>4</sup> These answered questions would be used to identify each participant's knowledge about the topics that would be discussed during implementation of this project and to track areas of improvement or change. The participant's answers to these questions provided a baseline that allowed me to track progress from start to finish. During this first meeting, the project, plan, and *lectio divina* were introduced.

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<sup>3</sup>See Appendix C.

<sup>4</sup>See Appendix E and F.

### *Week 2*

A lecture, “Renew Your Mind,” was the theme for the lecture.<sup>5</sup> *Lectio divina* was taught and practiced. Each participant received a “*Lectio Divina*” hand-out.<sup>6</sup> All four steps of *lectio divina* were practiced collectively using Philippians 4:2-9. Every individual commented that this was her first time to practice *lectio divina*. The vocal feedback was positive.

### *Week 3*

“Encounter Scriptures with All Five Senses” was the theme for the lecture.<sup>7</sup> I taught how all five senses can be used, three of those physically, and two spiritually, when encountering the word. A handout, “*Lectio Divina* Using the Five Senses,” was given to each participant.<sup>8</sup> *Lectio divina* was practiced collectively using 1 John 1:1-10. Prior to the next meeting, I called each participant to assign a set of Scriptures for her to practice *lectio divina*. This was *lectio divina* home assignment #1.

### *Week 4*

“Receive the Mind of Christ” was the theme for the lecture during this meeting.<sup>9</sup> A handout was given to each participant. The group practiced *lectio divina* using 1 Corinthians 2:9-16. The participants were also practicing *lectio divina* individually at

<sup>5</sup>See Appendix B.

<sup>6</sup>See Appendix I.

<sup>7</sup>See Appendix B.

<sup>8</sup>See Appendix J.

<sup>9</sup>See Appendix B.

home with a set of Scriptures I assigned to them. After this meeting, each participant was called privately for the second time with a different set of Scriptures, still pertaining to their area of struggle. This is *lectio divina* home assignment #2.

### *Week 5*

The theme for this meeting focused on “Flesh Verses Spirit.” A handout was given to each participant. *Lectio divina* was practiced collectively using Galatians 3:1-14. After this meeting, each participant was called privately for the third set of Scriptures to practice *lectio divina* on her own outside of the meeting. This was *lectio divina* home assignment #3.

### *Week 6*

“Made in the Image of God” was the lecture for this meeting.<sup>10</sup> Genesis 1:26-31 was the set of Scriptures used to practice *lectio divina*. The participants were challenged to choose their own sets of Scriptures pertaining to their areas of struggle to practice at home individually for *lectio divina* home assignment #4. I told the group that I would call them in a few days to find out the Scriptures they had chosen. Each participant did choose their set of Scriptures to practice *lectio divina*. At the end of this meeting, I asked if a participant would like to volunteer to come up with the Scriptures for our next meeting and also to lead our group with those Scriptures during our practice of *lectio divina*. A participant volunteered and agreed to lead the following week.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>See Appendix B.

<sup>11</sup>Because I understand that a good teacher teaches the students to replicate what they have been taught, I asked the participants to lead the next two meetings during our practice of *lectio divina*.

### *Week 7*

“Purpose to Meditate and Pray Scripture” was the lecture for this meeting.<sup>12</sup>

Joshua 1:8 was taught including information pertaining to the significance of *meditation* and *praying* the Word of God. The participant who volunteered to lead the group during this meeting gave the Scriptures and led the group during the practice of *lectio divina*. At the end of the meeting, the participants were challenged to choose their own set of Scriptures pertaining to their area of struggle to practice *lectio divina* at home for assignment #5. I told the group that I would call them in a few days to get the Scriptures they had chosen. Each participant did choose their set of Scriptures to practice *lectio divina*.

### *Week 8*

The last session ended with each group enjoying an “end of project celebration,” which included dinner for optimal fellowship and closure to the project. “Peace and Transformation” was the theme and lecture for our final meeting.<sup>13</sup> Isaiah 26:3-9 was the Scriptural focus for illustration. *Lectio divina* was led by a volunteer participant who had also chosen the set of Scriptures for our meeting. Each participant was given a post-test that corresponded to the pre-test, except the post-test consisted of five additional questions.<sup>14</sup> The five additional questions were necessary to gather information and

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<sup>12</sup>See Appendix B.

<sup>13</sup>See Appendix B.

<sup>14</sup>See Appendix G and H.

identify any changes in thoughts or behaviors that had occurred during the eight weeks.

During this last meeting, I collected their journal entries.

### *Post-Meeting*

Each participant engaged in a private one-on-one exit interview. The exit interview consisted of eight questions.<sup>15</sup> This interview was used to give a report on the participant's thoughts about *lectio divina* as well as any changes that occurred during the eight weeks.

### **Participant Reviews**

Eight individuals participated consistently in this eight-week research project. Three different groups met in three different locations. Those groups' locations and number of participants included:

- Group 1: Pregnancy Crisis Center, 2 participants
- Group 2: Chapel, 2 participants
- Group 3: A Participant's Home, 4 participants

Each participant had a folder that I prepared to place their pre and post-test surveys, one-on-one entrance/exit interviews, and journal entries. This allowed the information to remain organized. I handed the folders out at the beginning of each meeting and then collected them at the end. Utmost confidentiality has been maintained for each individual participant.

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<sup>15</sup>See Appendix D.

**Group One—Pregnancy Crisis Center***Participant A*

Participant A is a fifty-six year old divorced female. She regularly attends a Protestant, non-denominational church. During our first meeting, she expressed a desire to draw closer to the Lord. She reported, “I would like to walk victoriously and I know faith is the requirement. There is a conflict between our flesh and spirit. I know Scripture changes me.” She attended every meeting and completed all paperwork, including the pre and post-test surveys, journal entries, and one-on-one interviews, necessary for analysis.

*One-On-One Entrance Interview:* During the one-on-one entrance interview this participant reported,

I would like to be more God-minded than world-minded. I want to live more in the spirit than in the flesh. I would like to improve my thoughts with more clarity which would bring me closer to Him. I read the Word of God sometimes and would like to gain more depth and understanding beyond what I presently know. I sometimes struggle with negative thoughts without realizing it. I go back to familiar thoughts and don’t quickly cast them down. I would like to change and conquer existing thoughts, weaknesses, and behaviors by finding and applying Scriptures to them, prayer, and by the blood of Jesus. I am a work in progress.

*Pre-Test Survey:* This participant agreed that she regularly practiced meditating on Scripture, but had not heard of *lectio divina*. She expressed a desire to learn this spiritual practice. She reported a desire to change at least one behavior.

*Struggle:* The area of struggle this participant desired to change is to go *from a lack of faith toward security and trust in the Lord*. She reported,

I desire to trust God's plans and purposes. I want a full surrender and increased faith in Him. I want the fullness of what God has for me. I want to be strengthened in Him because I know all things rest in Him.

*Journaling:* In her journal entry, the participant commented,

Our lives are a process. We must make a decision that Scripture and change is for us, then move forward in what I believe is true for me. We all face life changing decisions. Faith is a requirement to walk victoriously. God speaks to each person through the Scripture in accordance to what that person needs. I have learned to take time to enter into the presence of God which is the purpose of effective prayer. I have improved in my area of struggle and learned to trust the Lord.

*Lectio Divina Home Assignment:* This assignment included practicing *lectio divina* individually, outside the meeting. Sets of Scriptures that pertained to her area of struggle, one set per week for three weeks, were assigned:

1. Philippians 3:7-21
2. Luke 18:1-8
3. Luke 8:40-56

During the last two weeks, the participant chose two different sets of Scriptures that pertained to her area of struggle to use to practice *lectio divina*:

4. Matthew 9:27-31
5. James 1:2-18

*Pre- and Post-Test Survey Results:* The following gives a report from this participant's answers to all the questions on the pre and post-test surveys.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>The pre-test survey had ten questions, but because none of the participants had heard of *lectio divina*, I added five additional questions to the post-test survey to get a conclusive analysis of changes that occurred from using *lectio divina*.

1. I have at least one area of weakness that I struggle with. (Note: This may be a weakness in thoughts and/or behaviors.) Pre-test response: agree; Post-test response: strongly agree<sup>17</sup>
2. I regularly meditate on Scripture. Pre-test response: strongly agree; Post-test response: strongly agree
3. I believe Scripture is one of the key components to change me. Pre-test response: agree; Post-test response: strongly agree
4. I have a set of Scriptures to meditate on daily that pertains to at least one area where I struggle. Pre-test response: disagree; Post-test response: strongly agree
5. I engage my five senses when I read Scripture. Pre-test response: agree; Post-test response: strongly agree
6. When I read Scripture, I remember it and reflect upon it throughout the day.  
Pre-test response: strongly agree; Post-test response: strongly agree
7. I practice a spiritual discipline on a regular basis. Pre-test response: strongly disagree; Post-test response: strongly agree
8. I have heard of the spiritual practice of *lectio divina*. Pre-test response: strongly disagree; Post-test response: strongly agree
9. I practice *lectio divina* on a regular basis. Pre-test response: strongly disagree; Post-test survey: strongly agree
10. I experience difficulty in my thoughts. Pre-test response: strongly agree; Post-test survey: disagree

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<sup>17</sup>Key for the pre and post-test survey: SA=Strongly Agree; A=Agree; N=Neutral; D=Disagree; and SD=Strongly Disagree

11. I have at least one area of struggle that has changed and improved as a result of practicing *lectio divina*. Post-test result: strongly agree
12. *Lectio divina* helps me remember Scriptures. Post-test result: strongly agree
13. During the eight weeks I have participated in this study, my thoughts and behaviors have improved and changed to be more in alignment with Scripture. Post-test result: strongly agree
14. *Lectio divina* has given me a way to engage in Scripture and encounter God on a deeper level. Post-test result: strongly agree
15. After this project, I will practice *lectio divina*. Post-test result: strongly agree

*Exit Interview:* The participant reported,

The Scriptures assigned to me to practice *lectio divina* were very comforting. I'm learning to "let go and let God." I feel like I'm in a race and God is passing a baton to me in a race He'll finish. I desire to trust Him as I'm in a transition-finishing stage and beginning a new one. I'm learning to trust Him for a new place. There is a fear of the unknown, but I'm totally surrendering to Him, even with no idea beyond. *Lectio divina* is a practice that requires a setting aside of time and the demands of the world to focus on our God and the truth in His Son through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is a time of entering into the presence of God which is the purpose of effective prayer. It brings peace through the Word and remembrance to the mind. I have improved my area of struggle during this process.

*Outcome:* The overall analysis indicated improvement and changes in her thinking and behavior *from lack of faith toward security and trust in the Lord*. On her exit interview, she reported that she felt like she had experienced 50% improvement toward transformation in the area where she struggled.

*Participant B*

Participant B was a 65 year old married female. She attends a Protestant, denominational church. She advocated interest in this project because she would like to spend more time in the Word of God. During our second meeting, she shared how God helped her come out of a coma over twelve years ago. Since that time, she said she had experienced difficulty sleeping throughout the night. She asked me to pray with her, believing for God to help her sleep and feel rested throughout her day.

This individual attended six out of the eight weeks of the research project. She missed two sessions because she needed to be out of town, but did correspond with me via cell phone to receive the information and assignments. She completed all paperwork, including the pre and post-test surveys, journal entries, and one-on-one interviews, necessary for analysis.

*One-On-One Entrance Interview:* During the one-on-one entrance interview this participant reported,

I would like to focus differently on Scriptures. I would like to end my journey with obedience and great faith. Faith, trust, and sowing and reaping are important. I rarely meditate on Scripture. I don't always reflect God in thoughts, word, and deed. I would like a set of Scriptures to help my marriage be better.

*Pre-Test Survey:* On the pre-test survey, this individual reported that she was not regularly meditating on Scripture. She desires to change at least one behavior.

*Struggle:* The area of struggle this participant desired to change is *to go from uncontrolled words toward controlled words*. She explained that she would like to

change how she responds to people, especially her husband and elderly mother. She reflected that when they have talked to her on many occasions, her responses were snappy and short, not reflecting the likeness of Christ. She desired to get Scriptures to help with this.

*Journaling:* In her journaling, this participant reported,

*Lectio divina* helped me study Scripture more intensely, see more and learn more. I have a deep desire to draw closer to the Lord and learn more of how to act like Him. I know Scripture is the way to encounter God more and I need to read and study more. I need to take time out of my life to study. I just watched a movie called, “The Book of Eli.” This movie ended with every Bible on earth being destroyed, but one man had memorized the entire Bible and could quote it. This movie helped me realize how extremely important it is to know and memorize the Word of God. I desire to learn the Word and change.

*Lectio Divina Home Assignment:* Sets of Scriptures were assigned, one per week for three weeks, to use to practice *lectio divina* at home. The Scriptures I assigned dealt with taming the tongue, kindness, and the power of words:

1. James 3:1-12
2. Ephesians 4:29-32
3. Colossians 4:2-6

The participant was asked to choose two sets of Scriptures to use to practice *lectio divina* for the last two weeks. She went out of town and did not choose her Scriptures for the last two weeks. During our last meeting together, she asked me to pray over her a prayer of healing for every area of her body and for her words to change. I prayed to God over her, and we both believed for changes to occur.

*Pre and Post-Test Survey Results:* The following gives a report from this participant's answers to all the questions on the pre and post-test surveys.

1. I have at least one area of weakness that I struggle with. (Note: This may be a weakness in thoughts and/or behaviors.) Pre-test response: strongly agree; Post-test response: strongly agree
2. I regularly meditate on Scripture. Pre-test response: disagree; Post-test response: agree
3. I believe Scripture is one of the key components to change me. Pre-test response: agree; Post-test response: strongly agree
4. I have a set of Scriptures to meditate on daily that pertains to at least one area where I struggle. Pre-test response: disagree; Post-test response: strongly agree
5. I engage my five senses when I read Scripture. Pre-test response: disagree; Post-test response: disagree
6. When I read Scripture, I remember it and reflect upon it throughout the day. Pre-test response: disagree; Post-test response: agree
7. I practice a spiritual discipline on a regular basis. Pre-test response: strongly disagree; Post-test response: agree
8. I have heard of the spiritual practice of *lectio divina*. Pre-test response: strongly disagree; Post-test response: strongly agree
9. I practice *lectio divina* on a regular basis. Pre-test response: strongly disagree; Post-test survey: agree

10. I experience difficulty in my thoughts. Pre-test response: strongly agree; Post-test survey: disagree
11. I have at least one area of struggle that has changed and improved as a result of practicing *lectio divina*. Post-test result: agree
12. *Lectio divina* helps me remember Scriptures. Post-test result: neutral
13. During the eight weeks I have participated in this study, my thoughts and behaviors have improved and changed to be more in alignment with Scripture. Post-test result: strongly agree
14. *Lectio divina* has given me a way to engage in Scripture and encounter God on a deeper level. Post-test result: agree
15. After this project, I will practice *lectio divina*. Post-test result: disagree

*Exit Interview:* This individual reported a change over the course of the eight weeks. She said,

Since practicing *lectio divina*, I have realized that Scripture is the key component to change. Over the last eight weeks of this study, I have been practicing *lectio divina* by praying and meditating on Scripture related to an area I struggle in. I struggle with speaking kind words to my husband and elderly mother. I have been focusing on the Word of God to help change this area. Also during this time, I felt led to seek medical treatment to improve my sleeping habits. Since this study, I have begun to sleep regularly. Now, I feel rested. I have become sweeter and kinder with my words to those around me. I talk kinder to my husband and my mother. I have learned to think before I talk. The Scriptures I have been meditating on have improved the way I talk. I would recommend this to anyone.

*Outcome:* This participant showed improvement in her area of struggle. She moved from *uncontrolled words toward a controlled tongue*. On her exit interview, she reported that

she felt like she had experienced 30% improvement toward transformation in the area where she struggled.

## **Group 2—Chapel**

### *Participant C*

Participant C is a 65 year old married female. She attends a Protestant, non-denominational church. At the onset of this project, this participant expressed a deep desire to grow in knowing Scripture and drawing closer to God. She attended every meeting and completed all paperwork, including the pre and post-test surveys, journal entries, and one-on-one interviews, necessary for analysis.

*One-On-One Entrance Interview:* During one-on-one entrance interviews this participant reported,

I want to wash my mind with the Word of God and learn to walk in love. I always gain from time in the Word of God. I want to know God better and better. I am interested in being able to cast imaginations (negative) and replace them with positive thoughts and thoughts of the future and not the past. I want to forgive and forget some past mistakes and failures. I battle with overcoming negative thoughts and with being offended. I want to wash my mind with the Word of God and learn to walk in love.

*Pre-Test Survey:* This participant agreed that there is a conflicting battle between the flesh and the spirit. She agreed that Scripture changes individuals. She desires to meditate more on Scripture. She has heard of *lectio divina*, but has never practiced it. She reported

that she would like to learn it. She strongly agreed that Scripture is the component God gave us for changing us. She desires to change at least one behavior.

*Struggle:* The area of struggle this participant desires to change is “to become more unselfish, kind, generous, considerate, and thoughtful.” The movement desired is *from selfishness toward selflessness.*

*Journaling:* This participant expressed her thoughts bountifully in her journal. She wrote,

I am looking forward to slowing down and quieting my mind to focus on the Word and to hear that still small voice and get in the presence of God. I’m learning to focus more on Jesus, the Word, The Christ. Being in God’s Word and presence is so good, to rest in Him and His love for us. The word is restoring what the world is constantly trying to steal. PEACE. Be like Jesus in response to persecution and have the words to witness, heal, and do miracles of love. Know God so well you receive those words that heal, love, and unify. Never give up, never quit. God will never leave us or forsake us. We have His lights in our earthen vessel to share with others.

*Lectio Divina Home Assignment:* Sets of Scriptures were assigned, one per week for three weeks, to practice *lectio divina* at home:

1. Mark 8:31-38
2. Philippians 2:1-11
3. John 13:3-17

During the last two weeks, the participant chose two different sets of Scriptures that pertained to her area of struggle to use to practice *lectio divina*:

4. Luke 12:13-34
5. Mark 10:46-52

*Pre and Post-Test Survey Results:* The following gives a report from this participant's answers to all the questions on the pre and post-test surveys.

1. I have at least one area of weakness that I struggle with. (Note: This may be a weakness in thoughts and/or behaviors.) Pre-test response: agree; Post-test response: strongly agree
2. I regularly meditate on Scripture. Pre-test response: agree; Post-test response: agree
3. I believe Scripture is one of the key components to change me. Pre-test response: agree; Post-test response: strongly agree
4. I have a set of Scriptures to meditate on daily that pertains to at least one area where I struggle. Pre-test response: disagree; Post-test response: strongly agree
5. I engage my five senses when I read Scripture. Pre-test response: neutral; Post-test response: neutral
6. When I read Scripture, I remember it and reflect upon it throughout the day. Pre-test response: strongly agree; Post-test response: agree
7. I practice a spiritual discipline on a regular basis. Pre-test response: disagree; Post-test response: agree
8. I have heard of the spiritual practice of *lectio divina*. Pre-test response: strongly disagree; Post-test response: strongly agree
9. I practice *lectio divina* on a regular basis. Pre-test response: strongly disagree; Post-test survey: agree

10. I experience difficulty in my thoughts. Pre-test response: strongly agree; Post-test survey: disagree
11. I have at least one area of struggle that has changed and improved as a result of practicing *lectio divina*. Post-test result: strongly agree
12. *Lectio divina* helps me remember Scriptures. Post-test result: agree
13. During the eight weeks I have participated in this study, my thoughts and behaviors have improved and changed to be more in alignment with Scripture. Post-test result: strongly agree
14. *Lectio divina* has given me a way to engage in Scripture and encounter God on a deeper level. Post-test result: strongly agree
15. After this project, I will practice *lectio divina*. Post-test result: neutral

*Exit Interview:* During the exit interview, the participant reported,

*Lectio divina* is holy reading. I have struggled with self-centeredness and over the past eight weeks I have improved in this area. It is because I have taken time to read the Bible in this in-depth, quiet, meditative way. It has taught me to let the words of the Bible soak down in your heart. It softens and opens your heart and mind to be able to hear the Holy Spirit speak. My thoughts have also improved over the last eight week of this study. I believe the more time spent in God's Word, in quiet seeking to connect with the Holy Spirit, the closer the relationship I have with God. Scriptures are always the way to remind us of who we are in Christ, what God has done for us, how much God, Jesus, and Holy Spirit loves us, and how God has already provided for everything we need...and, much, much more. I plan to practice *lectio divina* in the future as a devotional with my husband. I believe it will be a good way to bring unity among us as a couple, in our relationship with each other, and our individual relationship with God. Participating in this project has reminded me how important being disciplined to spend quality time in God's Word is. It is beneficial, even crucial, to all areas of life. It takes your mind off of self, and opens your heart to God and others.

*Outcome:* On her exit interview, the participant reported that she felt like she had experienced 30% improvement toward transformation in the area where she struggled. The overall analysis indicated that this participant improved *from selfishness toward unselfishness.*

#### *Participant D*

Participant D is a 44 year old female. She is a single mother of a boy who is four years old. She attends a Protestant, non-denominational church. She expressed that she has difficulty with her thoughts and desires to be set free from negative thinking and doubting. Another area she would like to grow in is being able to apply Scripture to her everyday life. She attended every meeting and asked if I would continue to meet with her to train her after this project is completed. She completed all the analysis, including the pre and post-test surveys, journal entries, and one-on-one interviews.

*One-On-One Entrance Interview:* This participant explained that there was nothing she wanted more than to know God intimately:

I have had some difficulty with my thought life and desire to be set free from negative thinking and doubt. There are many things I read in Scripture that I just don't understand or feel that I am able to apply. I thirst for God's word. It is the truth and I have such a desire to see it work in me and my life. I would like to move forward and let go of the past.....self-pity. I have a weakness of fear and a lack of fully trusting God. I experience doubt and unbelief. I've had a lot of negative things happen in my life and have had some difficulty rising above them. The way I know to change is to get as much word in me as I can, and pray consistently for delivery. I am finding the more that I do *lectio divina* the more enlightenment I am getting from the Word. I have been growing and changing by leaps and bounds by reading Scripture this way.

*Pre-Test Survey:* During the pre-test survey, this participant agreed that she had never heard of *lectio divina* prior to this project. She did agree that she meditates on Scripture regularly. She strongly agreed that she wants to change at least one behavior. She said she regularly experiences a conflicting will between her flesh and spirit. She agreed that Scripture changes her. She would like to change at least one behavior.

*Struggle:* This individual expressed a desire to change *from undisciplined behavior toward obedience.*

*Journaling:* This participant wrote a lot of detailed information during her journaling:

The introduction to *lectio divina* today was a blessing. I have never read Scripture this way and I believe that it will help me come a long way in meditation and getting the Word planted firmly in me. This is going to change my whole devotion time! Today I believe that God has showed me that I need to just fully trust in Him and to look to Him fully and not to my circumstances. I thoroughly enjoyed the meeting today. Last night I used four different versions of Scripture while doing *lectio divina* and it opened up the passage of Scripture to me in a way that I had never seen before. It left me in tears from the freedom that I received. I did *lectio divina* on Philippians 3 after being led there. God spoke to my heart about some things that I had been dealing with for the past two years, and that was letting go of my past and moving forward. It gave me the strength and wisdom to actually make that final decision to move forward and press on toward what God was calling me to. I consider everything in my past life to be rubbish compared to what I now know and have in Christ Jesus!

*Lectio Divina Home Assignment:* Sets of Scriptures were assigned, one per week for three weeks, to use to practice *lectio divina* at home:

1. Romans 8:1-17
2. Romans 6:1-14
3. Philippians 3:7-21

During the last two weeks, the participant chose two different sets of Scriptures that pertained to her area of struggle to use to practice *lectio divina*:

4. Galatians 5:16-26
5. Ephesians 6:10-18

*Pre and Post-Test Survey Results:* The following gives a report from this participant's answers to all the questions on the pre and post-test surveys.

1. I have at least one area of weakness that I struggle with. (Note: This may be a weakness in thoughts and/or behaviors.) Pre-test response: strongly agree; Post-test response: strongly agree
2. I regularly meditate on Scripture. Pre-test response: agree; Post-test response: strongly agree
3. I believe Scripture is one of the key components to change me. Pre-test response: agree; Post-test response: strongly agree
4. I have a set of Scriptures to meditate on daily that pertains to at least one area where I struggle. Pre-test response: agree; Post-test response: strongly agree
5. I engage my five senses when I read Scripture. Pre-test response: strongly disagree; Post-test response: agree
6. When I read Scripture, I remember it and reflect upon it throughout the day. Pre-test response: strongly agree; Post-test response: strongly agree
7. I practice a spiritual discipline on a regular basis. Pre-test response: agree; Post-test response: strongly agree
8. I have heard of the spiritual practice of *lectio divina*. Pre-test response: strongly disagree; Post-test response: strongly agree

9. I practice *lectio divina* on a regular basis. Pre-test response: strongly disagree;  
Post-test survey: strongly agree
10. I experience difficulty in my thoughts. Pre-test response: strongly agree; Post-test survey: agree
11. I have at least one area of struggle that has changed and improved as a result of practicing *lectio divina*. Post-test result: strongly agree
12. *Lectio divina* helps me remember Scriptures. Post-test result: strongly agree
13. During the eight weeks I have participated in this study, my thoughts and behaviors have improved and changed to be more in alignment with Scripture.  
Post-test result: strongly agree
14. *Lectio divina* has given me a way to engage in Scripture and encounter God on a deeper level. Post-test result: strongly agree
15. After this project, I will practice *lectio divina*. Post-test result: strongly agree

*Exit Interview:* During the exit interview, the participant reported,

*Lectio divina* is a divine or holy way to read Scripture. It is a way to go deeper and to get a better understanding of what I am reading. Reading Scripture this way enables me to retain what I have read a little better. I have struggled being carnally minded and desire to be more spiritually minded. I want to see things from the spiritual sense rather than the flesh. Because of *lectio divina*, over the past eight weeks I have grown stronger in my spirit and have grown more quiet. I have not given into depression as much. My thoughts have improved. I have been thinking more positively and my thoughts have been more fixed on Jesus. I have also been able to cast down wrong thoughts quicker than before. The Scriptures assigned to me to practice *lectio divina* at home have changed my mind, and my heart. It has given me a stronger thirst for the Word and a deeper longing to know more of Christ. I've come to realize that Jesus is really, truly, my deepest heart's desire. Everything else in my life is rubbish and means nothing compared to knowing Him! In the future, I think I will practice *lectio divina* because now I believe there is no other way to study Scripture! Participating in this project is priceless. I have grown and changed in many ways. I have learned a new way to

study the Word. I firmly believe this way is going to help me change even more and grow in my knowledge of the Word and of the Lord. I am very thankful to have been included in this project.

*Outcome:* On her exit interview, she reported that she felt like she had experienced 30% improvement toward transformation in the area where she struggled. The overall analysis indicated that this participant improved *from undisciplined behavior toward obedience.*

### **Group 3—Participant Home**

#### *Participant E*

Participant E is a 73 year old female who is a widow. She attends a Protestant, non-denominational church. She attended every meeting and completed all paperwork, including the pre and post-test surveys, journal entries, and one-on-one interviews, necessary for analysis.

*One-On-One Entrance Interview:* During this participant's entrance interview, this participant said,

I would like to have a deeper more intimate relationship with God. I have always wanted to, but I'm not organized. I would like to improve my thoughts. I sometimes gain insight from Scripture. I read a lot of Christian books, but not good enough. I would like to gain more insight from reading Scripture and understanding because I know I would feel closer to God and receive His leading for my life. I would like to conquer fear, insecurity, and feeling alone at times. I struggle with fear because I was abruptly taken from my home to live with my grandparents when I was a young child. I want to be able to let go and trust God. I struggle with worry since my husband has passed away. I really need help to overcome my fear.

*Pre-Test Survey:* According to the pre-test survey, this participant had never heard of *lectio divina*. She did express that she would like to increase her ability to remember Scripture and to reflect upon it throughout the day. She desires to change at least one behavior.

*Struggle:* The area this participant would like to change is to move *from anxiety toward comfort and reassurance*.

*Journaling:* This participant wrote,

This way of studying the Bible makes the Scripture come alive. Reading with *lectio divina* the Scripture became so real to me and who the Lamb of God really is. Tonight I also realized that God knows who we are also. I feel so much closer to the Lord since I started this study. It makes me slow down and focus. I feel like Jesus is saying to me not to fear, but to trust Him. *Lectio divina* has helped me with the Bible become so real to me. When Jesus said to Peter, “Who do you say I am” in Matthew 16, it made me come face to face with, “Do I really believe who Peter said that God is?” It made me realize we are all Peter understanding that Jesus is the Christ. We are the Church and he is giving us the keys to the kingdom to bind and to lose on earth. Just before my friend went to surgery, I gave her the Scriptures I had meditating on when I practiced *lectio divina* at home. Those Scriptures were Proverbs 3:24-26 that says, “When you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet. Have no fear of sudden disaster or of the ruin that overtakes the wicked, for the Lord will be at your side and will keep your foot from being snared.” My friend was very afraid before her surgery. Just before her surgery, she was saying those verses out loud. My friend did not survive the surgery. At the funeral, her daughter placed those verses on the funeral program. I know that those verses I used to practice *lectio divina* not only helped me with fear and anxiety, but also brought comfort and peace to my friend just before her surgery, and before she went to heaven.

*Lectio Divina Home Assignment:* Sets of Scriptures were assigned, one per week for three weeks, to use to practice *lectio divina* at home:

1. Isaiah 43:1-7
2. Proverbs 3:13-26
3. Isaiah 40:28-31

During the last two weeks, the participant chose two different sets of Scriptures that pertained to her area of struggle to use to practice *lectio divina* at home:

4. Matthew 6:25-34
5. Psalm 27:10-14

*Pre and Post-Test Survey Results:* The following gives a report from this participant's answers to all the questions on the pre and post-test surveys.

1. I have at least one area of weakness that I struggle with. (Note: This may be a weakness in thoughts and/or behaviors.) Pre-test response: strongly agree; Post-test response: strongly agree
2. I regularly meditate on Scripture. Pre-test response: agree; Post-test response: strongly agree
3. I believe Scripture is one of the key components to change me. Pre-test response: agree; Post-test response: strongly agree
4. I have a set of Scriptures to meditate on daily that pertains to at least one area where I struggle. Pre-test response: disagree; Post-test response: strongly agree
5. I engage my five senses when I read Scripture. Pre-test response: strongly disagree; Post-test response: strongly agree
6. When I read Scripture, I remember it and reflect upon it throughout the day. Pre-test response: agree; Post-test response: strongly agree

7. I practice a spiritual discipline on a regular basis. Pre-test response: strongly disagree; Post-test response: strongly agree
8. I have heard of the spiritual practice of *lectio divina*. Pre-test response: strongly disagree; Post-test response: strongly agree
9. I practice *lectio divina* on a regular basis. Pre-test response: strongly disagree; Post-test survey: neutral
10. I experience difficulty in my thoughts. Pre-test response: agree; Post-test survey: disagree
11. I have at least one area of struggle that has changed and improved as a result of practicing *lectio divina*. Post-test result: strongly agree
12. *Lectio divina* helps me remember Scriptures. Post-test result: strongly agree
13. During the eight weeks I have participated in this study, my thoughts and behaviors have improved and changed to be more in alignment with Scripture. Post-test result: strongly agree
14. *Lectio divina* has given me a way to engage in Scripture and encounter God on a deeper level. Post-test result: strongly agree
15. After this project, I will practice *lectio divina*. Post-test result: agree

*Exit Interview:* The participant shared that she used the second set of Scriptures she was assigned to help a friend of hers, just before she died. In her exit interview, she said,

*Lectio divina* has helped me deal with fear. Since childhood, I have experienced fear because I was abandoned and left in an unfamiliar and isolated place after being taken from my grandparent's home while only being told I was going for a ride. One of the Scriptures given to me for this study, Proverbs 3:24-26, helped me so much to realize God is there for me and I am not alone. Also, going over the Scriptures three or four times, and using my senses, made such a difference to

me! My thoughts have improved over the eight weeks by realizing that many things I thought I could not do, I was trying to do in my own strength. Now, I wait on the Lord knowing that He will renew my strength. I learned this from practicing *lectio divina* on Isaiah 40:28-31. These Scriptures helped me see much more clearly. I can depend on the LORD because “He is the creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. He gives power to the weak (me, many times) and to those who have no might (me, at times). He increases strength. But those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength.” These Scriptures became so much more real now with the process of *lectio divina*. Over the last eight weeks I have gained confidence in the LORD to help me to solve my problems, and not solve them in myself. Also, this method of study, going over the Scripture several times and engaging all the senses, has helped me become much closer to God. In the future, I will practice *lectio divina*. This method of studying the Scripture helped me examine my belief system and compare what I was telling myself to God’s Word. Now I understand that “I can do all things through God who strengthens me.” I loved participating in this project. I loved being with other women and getting their ideas. The study has made us much closer. Rather than rushing through the Scripture, this study helped me realize what God is saying to me personally. I loved it!

*Outcome:* On her exit interview, she reported that she felt like she had experienced 50% improvement toward transformation in the area where she struggled. The overall analysis indicated that this participant improved *from anxiety toward comfort and reassurance*.

#### *Participant F*

Participant F is a 62 year old married female. She attends a Protestant non-denominational church. She participated in every meeting and completed all the paperwork, including the pre and post-test surveys, journal entries, and one-on-one interviews, necessary for analysis.

*One-On-One Entrance Interview:* During the entrance interview, this participant expressed to me that she feels like she is missing something. She said,

I have thought for some time that I am missing something in my relationship with God. I would like to change my thoughts because I know that, “As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.” I definitely want to improve my thoughts. I sometimes read the Word of God. Sometimes I have difficulty understanding how a particular Scripture can apply to my life. I struggle with anxiety and worry stemming from wanting to control things that I cannot control or should not try to control. I need to study Scripture. I am excited to really “connect” with the “Word” and learn *lectio divina*.

*Pre-Test Survey:* On the pre-test survey this participant reported that she does not read Scripture out loud. In addition, the survey showed that Scripture changes her sometimes. She does meditate on Scripture on a regular basis. She desires to change at least one behavior.

*Struggle:* This participant shared with me that she has an internal struggle with pride. She wants to change this and desires to go *from pride toward humility*.

*Journaling:* The participant wrote,

This study is so exciting. I have never heard of *lectio divina* prior to this study. *Lectio divina* helps me look at all aspects of Scripture and learn to quiet my mind and listen to the Holy Spirit. God tells me not to look at my circumstances, but to keep my eyes on Jesus. I really like *lectio divina*. This is a new way for me to meditate on the Word. I think more Bible Study groups should use *lectio divina*. It is awesome!

*Lectio Divina Home Assignment:* Sets of Scriptures were assigned, one per week for three weeks, to use to practice *lectio divina* at home:

1. Philippians 2:3-18
2. 2 Corinthians 12:1-10
3. Luke 10:20-37

During the last two weeks, the participant chose two different set of Scriptures that pertained to her area of struggle to use to practice *lectio divina* at home:

4. Romans 12:1-8
5. Philippians 2:3-11

*Pre and Post-Test Survey Results:* The following gives a report from this participant's answers to all the questions on the pre and post-test surveys.

1. I have at least one area of weakness that I struggle with. (Note: This may be a weakness in thoughts and/or behaviors.) Pre-test response: strongly agree; Post-test response: strongly agree
2. I regularly meditate on Scripture. Pre-test response: agree; Post-test response: agree
3. I believe Scripture is one of the key components to change me. Pre-test response: strongly agree; Post-test response: strongly agree
4. I have a set of Scriptures to meditate on daily that pertains to at least one area where I struggle. Pre-test response: disagree; Post-test response: strongly agree
5. I engage my five senses when I read Scripture. Pre-test response: strongly disagree; Post-test response: strongly agree
6. When I read Scripture, I remember it and reflect upon it throughout the day. Pre-test response: agree; Post-test response: strongly agree
7. I practice a spiritual discipline on a regular basis. Pre-test response: strongly disagree; Post-test response: agree

8. I have heard of the spiritual practice of *lectio divina*. Pre-test response: disagree; Post-test response: strongly agree
9. I practice *lectio divina* on a regular basis. Pre-test response: strongly disagree; Post-test survey: strongly agree
10. I experience difficulty in my thoughts. Pre-test response: strongly agree; Post-test survey: disagree
11. I have at least one area of struggle that has changed and improved as a result of practicing *lectio divina*. Post-test result: strongly agree
12. *Lectio divina* helps me remember Scriptures. Post-test result: strongly agree
13. During the eight weeks I have participated in this study, my thoughts and behaviors have improved and changed to be more in alignment with Scripture. Post-test result: strongly agree
14. *Lectio divina* has given me a way to engage in Scripture and encounter God on a deeper level. Post-test result: strongly agree
15. After this project, I will practice *lectio divina*. Post-test result: agree

*Exit Interview:* The participant reported,

One area I have been struggling with is pride. *Lectio divina* has helped me by reading the Scriptures. While I was studying Scriptures about pride during this study, God also directed my pastor at my church to speak on the subject. Then, I also heard messages about pride on the radio. I have now realized how foolish it is to be prideful about anything because it is not “I” that does anything good, but God who does it through me. Scripture and practicing *lectio divina* has showed me that pride is maybe the greatest sin that other sins stem from. Satan, in his pride, wanted to be as great as God and it led to the downfall of the human race. In the future I will practice *lectio divina* because it is a way to get deeper into Scripture by committing it to memory, understand and comprehend it more fully, to communicate with God, and allow Him to change me. This project has given me a new avenue to explore the Scripture.

*Outcome:* On her exit interview, she reported that she felt like she had experienced 50% improvement toward transformation in the area where she struggled. The overall analysis indicated that this participant improved *from pride toward humility.*

### *Participant G*

Participant G is a 70 year old single female. She participated in five of the eight meetings. She attends a Protestant, non-denominational church. Because of unexpected problems that arose in her family, she dropped out after the fifth week. The information she provided is included, but her analysis is incomplete. Her information is provided here, but not included in the final reports for overall conclusive analysis.

*One-On-One Entrance Interview:* This participant expressed a desire to improve her thoughts and reported,

I would like to improve my thoughts and mental thinking that causes me to fear and doubt resulting in opening doors up to my enemy to cause depression and lack of joy in the Lord. I read the Word of God sometimes, but get overwhelmed with burdens and cares of this world, both in my private life and in the condition of this whole world. I would like to gain more insight. I want to be Jesus' companion and be more mindful of what He did at Calvary for me. But mainly, I want to know Him in the Power of His resurrection. I struggle with fear and enabling emotions and heartaches to rule me. I want to "fix" everything myself, instead of trusting God's word that He is our "fixer."

*Pre-Test Survey:* On the pre-test survey, this participant reported that she reads Scripture, but does not always remember it. She desires a way to remember it more. She agrees that Scripture changes her. She does not practice meditating on the Word on a regular basis. She had never heard of *lectio divina* prior to this study.

*Struggle:* The participant shared that her area of struggle is worry. She desired to go *from worry toward reassurance and hope in the Lord.*

*Journaling:* This participant wrote in her journal,

I have a strong desire to BE STILL AND KNOW THAT HE IS GOD— which I say to myself several times daily. I struggle with negative thoughts. I struggle with a lack of peace, but it is getting better over the last few weeks. Jesus was (and is) just a normal guy—but also Messiah. He relates to us (His own creation) in such a social way. It makes Scripture come “alive.” The WORD IS ALIVE (JESUS). Jesus got away from the disciples to pray, so should we. Because of this study, I am beginning to speak Scriptures out loud.

*Lectio Divina Home Assignment:* Sets of Scriptures were assigned, one per week for three weeks, to use to practice *lectio divina* at home:

1. Isaiah 43:1-7
2. Proverbs 3:13-26
3. Isaiah 40:28-31

#### *Participant H*

Participant H is a 48 year old married female. She attends a Protestant, non-denominational church. She entered this project with an anticipation of “learning to have clear good thoughts and to understand Scripture more clearly.” She attended six out of the eight meetings. She received the information she missed via cell phone. She completed all the paperwork, including the pre and post-test surveys, journal entries, and one-on-one interviews, necessary for analysis.

*One-On-One Entrance Interview:* During the one-on-one entrance exam, this participant reported,

I feel like God teaches me a lot when I read the Word, but I don't read the word as often as I should. I want to work on reading more Scripture and understand it more clearly. I pray more than I read Scripture. I desire to get closer to God. I desire to quit worrying and to help more people.

*Pre-Test Survey:* On the pre-test survey, this participant agreed that she does not meditate on Scripture regularly. She had never heard of *lectio divina*. She would like to change at least one behavior. She agreed that her thoughts sometimes reflect upon Scripture throughout the day.

*Struggle:* This individual desires to move from anger toward contentment.

*Journaling:* This participant wrote,

I learned that sometimes God takes his time answering us. I desire to have more faith and not to doubt God. I desire to not be angry with my husband who I believe is not saved. I also deal with anger toward my supervisor.

*Lectio Divina Home Assignment:* Sets of Scriptures were assigned, one per week for three weeks, to use to practice *lectio divina* at home:

1. Romans 12:9-21
2. Ephesians 4:23-32
3. James 1:2-4

During the last two weeks, the participant chose two different set of Scriptures that pertained to her area of struggle to use to practice *lectio divina* at home:

4. Matthew 5:43-48
5. 1 Peter 3:8-12

*Pre and Post-Test Survey Results:* The following gives a report from this participant's answers to all the questions on the pre and post-test surveys.

1. I have at least one area of weakness that I struggle with. (Note: This may be a weakness in thoughts and/or behaviors.) Pre-test response: strongly agree; Post-test response: strongly agree
2. I regularly meditate on Scripture. Pre-test response: disagree; Post-test response: strongly agree
3. I believe Scripture is one of the key components to change me. Pre-test response: agree; Post-test response: strongly agree
4. I have a set of Scriptures to meditate on daily that pertains to at least one area where I struggle. Pre-test response: disagree; Post-test response: strongly agree
5. I engage my five senses when I read Scripture. Pre-test response: strongly disagree; Post-test response: agree
6. When I read Scripture, I remember it and reflect upon it throughout the day. Pre-test response: agree; Post-test response: strongly agree
7. I practice a spiritual discipline on a regular basis. Pre-test response: strongly disagree; Post-test response: strongly agree
8. I have heard of the spiritual practice of *lectio divina*. Pre-test response: strongly disagree; Post-test response: strongly agree

9. I practice *lectio divina* on a regular basis. Pre-test response: strongly disagree;  
Post-test survey: strongly agree
10. I experience difficulty in my thoughts. Pre-test response: agree; Post-test  
survey: disagree
11. I have at least one area of struggle that has changed and improved as a result  
of practicing *lectio divina*. Post-test result: strongly agree
12. *Lectio divina* helps me remember Scriptures. Post-test result: agree
13. During the eight weeks I have participated in this study, my thoughts and  
behaviors have improved and changed to be more in alignment with Scripture.  
Post-test result: strongly agree
14. *Lectio divina* has given me a way to engage in Scripture and encounter God  
on a deeper level. Post-test result: strongly agree
15. After this project, I will practice *lectio divina*. Post-test result: strongly agree

*Exit Interview:* The participant reported,

*Lectio divina* helped me learn about the Word of God. I have been struggling with anger and bitterness. This study has been helping me. I have improved over the last eight weeks by focusing on the Word of God, but I am still working on it. I still struggle a little bit, but not as much. In the future, I hope to practice *lectio divina*.

*Outcome:* On her exit interview, she reported that she felt like she had experienced 50% improvement toward transformation in the area where she struggled. The overall analysis indicated that this participant improved *from anger toward contentment*.

*Participant I*

Participant I is a 75 year old female. She attends a Catholic church. She is a widow who lives alone. She missed two meetings, but was given all the information taught during those meetings. She completed all the paperwork, including the pre and post-test surveys, journal entries, and one-on-one interviews, necessary for analysis.

*One-On-One Entrance Interview:* This participant reported,

I struggle with negative thoughts that I know make me depressed. I live alone and desire to change the way I think. I am excited to go to this study and learn how to grow in the Lord. I know that it is the Lord who helps us change. I don't always meditate on the Word. I know I need to take more time out of my life to read it and do what it says.

*Pre-Test Survey:* On the pre-test survey, this participant agreed that she does not meditate on Scripture on a regular basis. She agreed that she had never heard of *lectio divina*. She agreed that she would like to change at least one behavior.

*Struggle:* This participant struggles with fear. She expressed a desire to move *from fear toward peacefulness*.

*Journaling:* In her journal entries, this participant wrote,

I love the Lord, but I desire to change. I live alone since I lost my husband. I get depressed because I fear losing my condo. I would like to not fear and have peace. I have never heard of *lectio divina* that is taught in this study, but I am excited to learn it. Now that I've learned *lectio divina*, I want to meditate on Scripture more. I now understand that God has given me Scripture to help me grow and change. And, I know that God loves me very much. He desires to help me live in peace. I'm growing and learning to be more peaceful.

*Lectio Divina Home Assignment:* A set of Scriptures were assigned, one per week for three weeks, to use to practice *lectio divina* at home:

1. Psalm 27:1-6
2. Matthew 6:25-34
3. Philippians 4:4-9

During the last two weeks, the participant chose two different sets of Scriptures that pertained to her area of struggle to use to practice *lectio divina* at home:

4. John 10:9-15
5. Isaiah 41:8-13

*Pre and Post-Test Survey Results:* The following gives a report from this participant's answers to all the questions on the pre and post-test surveys.

1. I have at least one area of weakness that I struggle with. (Note: This may be a weakness in thoughts and/or behaviors.) Pre-test response: strongly agree; Post-test response: strongly agree
2. I regularly meditate on Scripture. Pre-test response: disagree; Post-test response: strongly agree
3. I believe Scripture is one of the key components to change me. Pre-test response: agree; Post-test response: strongly agree
4. I have a set of Scriptures to meditate on daily that pertains to at least one area where I struggle. Pre-test response: disagree; Post-test response: strongly agree
5. I engage my five senses when I read Scripture. Pre-test response: neutral; Post-test response: strongly agree

6. When I read Scripture, I remember it and reflect upon it throughout the day.  
Pre-test response: disagree; Post-test response: strongly agree
7. I practice a spiritual discipline on a regular basis. Pre-test response: strongly disagree; Post-test response: strongly agree
8. I have heard of the spiritual practice of *lectio divina*. Pre-test response: strongly disagree; Post-test response: strongly agree
9. I practice *lectio divina* on a regular basis. Pre-test response: strongly disagree; Post-test survey: agree
10. I experience difficulty in my thoughts. Pre-test response: disagree; Post-test survey: agree
11. I have at least one area of struggle that has changed and improved as a result of practicing *lectio divina*. Post-test result: strongly agree
12. *Lectio divina* helps me remember Scriptures. Post-test result: agree
13. During the eight weeks I have participated in this study, my thoughts and behaviors have improved and changed to be more in alignment with Scripture. Post-test result: strongly agree
14. *Lectio divina* has given me a way to engage in Scripture and encounter God on a deeper level. Post-test result: strongly agree
15. After this project, I will practice *lectio divina*. Post-test result: strongly agree

*Exit Interview:* The participant reported,

I now understand that it is not only the Lord who changes me, but He's given me the Word to help me. The Scriptures given to me to practice *lectio divina* that focus on my struggle have really helped me. *Lectio divina* has helped me meditate and allow God time to speak to my heart. *Lectio divina* has also helped me

understand Scripture better because it allowed me to go deeper. Because of this study, I have decided that I will read Scripture everyday. It has also taught me to allow myself time to pray and engage in a time of praise and appreciation of God. Participating in this study has taught me to meditate on Scripture and trust the Lord.

*Outcome:* On her exit interview, she reported that she felt like she had experienced 50% improvement toward transformation in the area where she struggled. The overall analysis indicated that this participant improved *from fear toward peacefulness*.

## Reports

### Pre-Test Survey Results

SA	A	N	D	SD
1. 75%	25%	0%	0%	0%
2. 25%	50%	0%	25%	0%
3. 12.5%	87.5%	0%	0%	0%
4. 0%	12.5%	0%	87.5%	0%
5. 0%	12.5%	25%	12.5%	50%
6. 37.5%	37.5%	0%	25%	0%
7. 0%	12.5%	0%	12.5%	75%
8. 0%	0%	0%	12.5%	87.5%
9. 0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
10. 62.5%	25%	0%	12.5%	0%

### Post-Test Survey Results

SA	A	N	D	SD
1. 100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
2. 62.5%	37.5%	0%	0%	0%
3. 100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
4. 100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
5. 50%	25%	12.5%	12.5%	0%
6. 75%	25%	0%	0%	0%
7. 62.5%	37.5%	0%	0%	0%
8. 100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
9. 50%	37.5%	12.5%	0%	0%
10. 0%	25%	0%	75%	0%
11. 87.5%	12.5%	0%	0%	0%
12. 50%	37.5%	12.5%	0%	0%
13. 100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
14. 87.5%	12.5%	0%	0%	0%
15. 50%	25%	12.5%	12.5%	0%

Key: SA=Strongly Agree; A=Agree; N=Neutral; D=Disagree; SD=Strongly Disagree.  
 Key for answers: 1=12.5%; 2=25%; 3=37.5%; 4=50%; 5=62.5%; 6=75%; 7=87.5%;  
 8=100%. Because there were eight participants, each answer was worth 12.5 percentage points.

## Overall Synopsis

The overall synopsis indicates that each participant experienced a transformation during this project. As observed in question eight, only one participant had heard of *lectio divina*, and none of them had ever practiced it. Between the pre- and post-tests, the most outstanding changes were reported in questions three, four, and seven.

On question three, the participants demonstrate that when they entered the project they lacked understanding that Scripture is the key component to change. At the end of the project, all eight participants changed their minds and agreed that Scripture is a key component to change. Question four showed a significant change in every participant. They went from not having a set of Scriptures to meditate on that pertained to their area of struggle, to having a set of Scriptures that was prescribed to each one based on her area of need. Question seven reported significant changes. Seven of the participants were not practicing any spiritual discipline. After eight weeks of study, all eight reported practicing a spiritual discipline on a regular basis.

The post-test survey reflected the participant's thoughts about *lectio divina*. As indicated in the reports above, every participant reported that they had changed and improved as a result of practicing *lectio divina*. Seven out of the eight reported that *lectio divina* helps them remember Scripture. All eight reported that their thoughts and behaviors have changed to be more aligned with Scripture and that *lectio divina* has given them a way to engage in Scripture and encounter God on a deeper level. Six out of the eight report that they will practice *lectio divina* after this project is finished.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **REFLECTION, SUMMARY, AND CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, I reflect on the development of this model of ministry, including how it impacted me personally. Project expectations and outcomes are compared and how those who participated in the project were affected and changed is examined. This chapter also provides recommendations for those interested in future replication of this project.

#### **Reflection**

During the implementation of this project, the following Scriptures became very real to me: “We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose,” and, “The steps of a man [or woman] are established by the LORD, when He delights in His way” (Romans 8:28 and Psalm 37:23, emphasis mine). After viewing an advertisement that gave a brief description for this doctorate program in a Kenneth Copeland Ministry magazine, I began thinking about pursuing this degree. At that moment the Holy Spirit triggered my heart, and I began to seek God to see if this was something I was supposed to do. Over the next few days, the Holy Spirit kept nudging my heart, so I applied to the program. After I was accepted into the program, I realized that I did not have in place all the needed requirements, such as a place to teach or the participants I needed for the implementation of this project.

Although I lacked all the necessary requirements, I took a leap of faith and placed my peace in knowing that when God directs something, He has the ability to move mountains, putting into place everything I would need to do what He had asked me to do.

Over the next three years, I learned even more how to place my confidence and trust in God. As I started my doctorate, I had no idea what my topic would be. But when I sought Him, I felt a nudge to teach a method, or system, for people to engage in His Word. Then, a spiritual practice I had learned when I was working on my master's degree, *lectio divina*, kept coming to mind.

*Lectio divina* has deep historic roots in and is commonly practiced in the Catholic tradition. When I started my project, the supervisor chosen for my group was Catholic. In fact, she was the only Catholic in the entire seminary. Over the next six months, God began to tell me that *lectio divina* would be my topic. Realizing that my supervisor could give me better insight on this topic than any other person in her position at the seminary was continued affirmation of God's direction for this project. While implementing this project, I surprisingly discovered that although *lectio divina* finds its roots in the ancient Desert Fathers and the Catholic tradition, it is becoming an accepted spiritual practice in most Christian churches.

During these past three years, God has met every need I had for this project. He did not just give me one place to teach; He gave me three. God did not just give me a few people to participate; He gave me eight. God did not just give me any supervisor; He gave me one that understood my topic. Not only that, but when I began to seek God for an editor, He gave me the very best. God has gone above and beyond, being faithful and trustworthy to the end. In every way possible, God gave me the grace I needed to work

on this project and complete it with success. He showed up and showed off by leading me every step of the way. I am so thankful for what He has done through me and for me and what He will do in the lives of those touched by this project.

## Summary

The data research brought many surprising discoveries. While I researched the data for chapter two, I learned that *lectio divina* has made a recent resurgence in the Church at large with acceptance in both Catholic and Protestant churches. I was enlightened by the current information available about how *lectio divina* is making a difference not only in the church setting, but is also being taught in universities, including seminaries as well as secular universities. I discovered that business leaders are being influenced by *lectio divina* because it is being taught in their college courses.

Chapter three brought more surprises. During my research, I began to think about how the roots of *lectio divina* were established with monks, particularly in the Catholic Church, and this would include a previous monk, Martin Luther, who gave up his ministry as a monk to lead the Protestant Reformation. I began to ponder on that and thought that Martin Luther had probably practiced *lectio divina* on a regular basis when he was a monk, and that perhaps he had adapted *lectio divina* to a similar system. As I researched, I was ecstatic when I made the discovery that Martin Luther had, in fact, adapted *lectio divina* into a similar system and taught it to others. Then I began to think that perhaps other leaders had also adopted a similar method or system into their spiritual disciplines. I discovered that many leaders had regularly practiced spiritual disciplines similar to *lectio divina*, including the founder of the Methodist movement, John Wesley.

My field research produced numerous findings, some that aligned with my expectations and others that did not. The following is a summary of all the pertinent findings from the research project. After discovering during the first week of the project that none of the participants had ever practiced *lectio divina*, I was concerned that it would be difficult for the participants to learn the practice, and be transformed by it, during such a short timeframe. However, chapters four and five proved differently. Based on the results of the research, this was an incorrect assumption. According to the post-test survey, every participant learned *lectio divina* and experienced some level of transformation in her area of struggle.

At the outset of the project, it was evident that some participants were more eager to learn how to practice *lectio divina* than others. Two of those expressed excitement about telling others about it, and they began practicing *lectio divina* every day immediately after I explained the practice. Most of the others practiced *lectio divina* only as it was assigned. I expected that those who expressed excitement about *lectio divina* and began practicing it immediately would report greater results for change. However, to my surprise, those participants did not report greater change in thought and/or behavior compared to others. In fact, several participants who only practiced *lectio divina* as assigned reported greater percentages of transformation in their areas of struggle.

I did not expect that every participant would report that she liked *lectio divina* and strongly agree that it is an effective tool to help engage in Scripture and experience deeper intimacy with God. However, it is interesting to note that only 50 percent of the participants strongly agreed that they would use *lectio divina* regularly after the project was completed. Of the remaining participants, 25 percent agreed, 12.5 percent were

neutral, and 12.5 percent disagreed that they would engage in the practice in the future.

This is especially surprising since every participant strongly agreed that *lectio divina* changed them.

I found three additional results from the pre and post-test reports to be significant. At the beginning, I understood that the participants were all church-going Christ followers. To my surprise, most of the participants did not have Scriptures to meditate on that pertained to their areas of struggle, and many did not know how to search for one. After eight weeks, the post-test concluded that every participant had a Scripture that pertained to an area of struggle. The pre-test reported that only a few believed that Scripture is the key component to change. The post-test showed a shift to every participant believing that Scripture is the key component to change. Finally, there was a notable difference in thoughts. Seven out of eight participants reported in the pre-test that they experienced difficulty in their thoughts. That changed to only two reporting difficulty in their thoughts on the post-test.

The hypothesis was that women who experience internal struggle with thought patterns that are in conflict with what the Bible teaches about God, others, or themselves, and whose words and/or actions are reflective of this internal conflict, will experience renewal of the mind and transformation of behavior through the practice of *lectio divina*. The hypothesis was proven valid. All participants reported improvement in their areas of struggle after engaging in *lectio divina* during the course of the project. Every participant reported that she liked *lectio divina* and agreed that it is an effective tool to help engage in the Scripture and to experience deeper intimacy with God.

## Conclusion

### *Project Model Replication*

This project is replicable in many settings. I think the greatest challenge for those who replicate this model would be choosing the sets of Scriptures that would be used in a group setting, as well as those assigned to each participant for their home assignment. I was surprised by one of the comments made by one of the participants, who is a new convert to Christianity, during one of our group settings. She expressed that the set of Scriptures I chose for us to meditate on as a group and to practice *lectio divina* was “too theological.” After she expressed this, I understood why she felt this way. Because of this, I would caution facilitators to be aware of the levels of understanding the participants have about Scripture when they choose a set of Scriptures to practice *lectio divina*.

I spent a large amount of time looking at the index, reading over Scriptures, and choosing Scriptures to assign for each participant to use to practice *lectio divina*. I have since discovered some books that are helpful for choosing Scriptures in a shorter amount of time. Those books include: Thelma Hall, *Too Deep for Words*; Stephen Binz, *Lectio Divina Bible Study: The Creed in Scripture* (*Lectio Divina Bible Studies*); and Mary DeTurris Poust, *The Essential Guide to Catholic Prayer and the Mass: Deepen Your Spiritual Life Through the Catholic Traditions of Prayer and Worship*.

### *Implications for Future Research*

I have considered several areas of improvement for the research project. Several participants expressed obstacles to their practice of *lectio divina*, such as the time it takes to go through each step. Participants would benefit from a lesson that identifies this obstacle and gives suggestions on how it could be overcome. Additionally, providing the participants with a recommended list of books that provides sets of Scriptures based on themes would be beneficial for the participants when they choose their own sets of Scriptures for their *lectio divina* home assignments. Finally, the use of digital media would be helpful, including having the group practice *lectio divina* in a guided online session. Other helpful suggestions would be giving hand-outs with suggestions for web sites to view, using power point for clarity during the meetings, and using an overhead projector for illustrations.

The practice of *lectio divina* addresses one of the most basic needs of humanity—to be freed from the bondage of sinful thought and behavior patterns. Because of its ability to transform people toward Christ-likeness through its adherence to the Word and reliance on the Holy Spirit, I believe that practicing *lectio divina* is imperative for the modern Church. I plan to use my knowledge of and experience with *lectio divina* to minister to others in person, through my website, and in any other capacity that the Lord directs. I expect that God will use me to direct others back to His Word and His Spirit so that He may bring transformation and restoration to His people.

## **APPENDIX**

**APPENDIX A**

**PARTICIPANT AGREEMENT FORM**

**LETTER OF AGREEMENT OF PARTICIPATION**

Requested by:

Marla Woodmansee, Candidate for Doctor of Ministry  
205 Regent Dr.  
Branson, MO 65616  
417.592.5922

I, \_\_\_\_\_ agree to participate in a six-week lecture/discussion research study on *Experience Renewal of the Mind and Transformation of Behavior Through the Spiritual Practice of Lectio Divina*, led by researcher Marla Woodmansee.

I am aware that the outcomes of this study are a partial requirement for a Doctor of Ministry from United Theological Seminary.

I will make it a priority to attend all of the sessions in order to effectively participate in this study.

I understand that all personal information discussed between participants is confidential. I understand that the researcher may use any of the information acquired throughout the study and each participant's identity will not be disclosed without participant consent.

I understand that the journals are the property of the researcher but each participant may request copies of his or her own journal entries.

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Participant Signature

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Date

**APPENDIX B**  
**LESSON PLANS**

## PARTICIPANT LESSON PLANS

**Pre-Meeting** One-on-one participant entrance interview

- Prior to the first session, each participant engaged in a one-on-one entrance interview. Each participant met with me privately and personally.

**Week 1** Introduction to Project  
 “Romans 12:2 & *Lectio Divina*”  
 Participant Survey—Pre-Test

- Hand-out to each participant a folder that includes: paper for journal entries, pre-test survey, and a calendar with dates for each meeting.
- Begin the first session by handing out the pre-test survey and allowing each participant time to answer the questions.
- Read the foundational Scripture: Romans 12:2. “Do not be conformed to this world, but be *transformed* by the *renewal of your mind*, that by testing you may discern what the will of God is, acceptable and perfect.”
- Introduce project and *lectio divina*.
- Briefly explain the four steps of *lectio divina*: *lectio*/read, *meditatio*/meditate, *oratio*/pray, *contemplatio*/contemplate.
- Give the hand-out with an explanation for each step of *lectio divina*. (See below.)
- Read 2 Timothy 3:16. Explain that Scripture is the necessary component God gave us to change to be more Christ-like.
- Read John 1:1-5 that explains the importance of the Word of God.
- End the meeting with every participant writing a journal entry. I will prompt this by asking the participants to write down what stood out to them during the meeting.

### The Practice of *Lectio Divina*

*Lectio divina* is generally comprised of four movements—*lectio* (read), *meditatio* (meditate), *oratio* (pray), and *contemplatio* (contemplate):

1. *Lectio* / Read—A passage of Scripture is read out loud. After reading Scripture out loud, engage the intellect and reflect upon the verses for one to three minutes. Look at the context of the passage of Scripture being reflected upon and look for the *literal* sense. Ask the questions: who, what, where, why, and when did this take place. It is helpful to use a study Bible to look at notes or a commentary to help enlighten the participant. Deciding the genre of the passage is also beneficial. For instance, is it a parable (a story to illustrate a point), a historical narrative (a real-life event), or a poem.
2. *Meditatio* / Meditate—Read the Scripture out loud for the second time. For one to three minutes the meaning of the Scripture is reflected upon with an

active mind. This involves engaging the heart and asking the questions, “What and how does this passage of Scripture relate to me personally?” and also, using the imagination to place oneself into the text. This involves allowing personal experiences, memories, thoughts, feelings, hopes, and desires to be integrated as the passage is reflected upon. This allows for the *spiritual* sense of the Scripture to be engaged.

3. *Oratio / Pray*—Read the Scripture out loud for the third time. Respond to the passage of Scripture by opening the heart more deeply and asking the Lord to help apply this truth to his or her life. This is taking time to pray the word. The prayer may include petitioning God for whatever the heart desires, contrition, asking for forgiveness, asking for healing, expressing help to relieve pain, hurt, anger, and, frustration, or, perhaps engaging in a time of praise—appreciation of, gratitude for, and adoration of God. Prayer time is the human response to the passage of Scripture being reflected upon.
4. *Contemplatio / Contemplate*—Read the Scripture out loud for the fourth time. Rest in the Lord. Allow God time to speak. This means being quiet and receiving from God. This is allowing God time to speak to the heart of the participant. After engaging in *lectio divina* the participant is to allow the passage of Scripture meditated upon to interact with his or her life and to respond to it by changing behaviors. Meditation on Scripture will allow participants to remember it and reflect upon it throughout the day, weeks, months, or years to come.

## Week 2

### “Renew Your Mind”

Four Steps of *Lectio Divina* Practiced Collectively—Philippians 4:2-9

- Begin the meeting by reading Romans 12:2.
- Explain that the mind can be renewed by the Word of God. This is supported by not only God’s word, but by science as well.
- Quote Dr. Caroline Leaf. Explain what happens from a physiological perspective when one’s thoughts, including destructive words and stories, enter the brain: Toxic thoughts are thoughts that trigger negative and anxious emotions, which produce biochemicals that cause the body stress. They are stored in your mind, as well as in the cells of your body...The surprising truth is that every single thought—whether it is positive or negative—goes through the same cycle when it forms. Thoughts are basically electrical impulses, chemicals and neurons. They look like tree with branches. As the thoughts grow and become permanent, more branches grow and the connections become stronger.<sup>1</sup>
- According to Leaf, meditating upon these “toxic thoughts” increases their biochemical strength which increases one’s tendency toward poor behavior, illnesses, and self-defeating choices. Leaf explains that the mind and body are

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<sup>1</sup>Leaf, 19.

inherently linked: “We have two choices: we can let our thoughts become toxic and poisonous, or we can detox our negative thoughts, which will improve our emotional wholeness and even recover our physical health.”<sup>2</sup>

- Aligning one’s thoughts with the Word of God—renewing the mind—is the key, from both a physiological and spiritual perspective, to transform future thinking and behavior.
- Read Deuteronomy 30:19. “Today I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings and curses. Now I call on heaven and earth to witness the choice you make. Oh, that you would choose life, so that you and your descendants might live!” (NLT).
- Explain that from the earliest biblical accounts to today, God’s people have been given the freedom to choose life—adherence to the Word by the power of the Holy Spirit—or death—a rejection of it in favor of self-reliance. Though aligning oneself to the Word is not a guarantee of a life of ease, it is assurance of transformation toward the likeness of Christ.
- Practice *lectio divina* as a group using Philippians 4:2-9.
- End the session with each participant writing a journal entry that pertains to what they experienced or learned during this session.

### **Week 3**

“Encounter Scripture with all Five Senses”

*Lectio Divina* Practiced Collectively—1 John 1:1-10

Home Assignment #1 for Individual *Lectio Divina*

- Begin by explaining how I was introduced to *lectio divina* and my personal experience with it. (The details of this is included in chapter one.)
- Give a brief history of *lectio divina*. (I chose details from chapter 3.)
- Explain my interview with Father John Paul, a monk, who explained the importance of using all five senses when practicing *lectio divina*.
- Teach the following information about the five senses:

#### *Lectio Divina-Five Senses*

*Lectio divina* engages the five senses to obtain optimal learning of Scripture. Tests and research has proven that the more senses used during learning the more of what is being learned remains.

1. *See* Scripture—Sight is used to read Scripture.
2. *Touch* Scripture—Follow along the verses by pointing with your index finger.
3. *Hear* Scripture—Read Scripture out loud.

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<sup>2</sup>Leaf, 21.

4. *Taste* Scripture—"How sweet are your words to my *taste*, sweeter than honey to my mouth" (Psalm 119:103). "Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name, O LORD, God of hosts" (Jeremiah 15:16). "Oh, *taste* and see that the LORD is good; How blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him" (Psalm 34:8).
5. *Smell* Scripture—Smell in a spiritual sense. Scripture denotes, "Thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the *fragrance* of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the *aroma* of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ" (2 Corinthians 2:14-17). The smoke of Noah's sacrifice is called *sweet*. "Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and took some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And when the LORD *smelled* the pleasing aroma, the LORD said in his heart, 'I will never again curse the ground because of man. . .' " (Genesis 8:20-21). The Levitical burnt offering is said to be ". . . a pleasing *aroma* . . . to the LORD" (Exodus 29:18). Christ's love for us is a *fragrant* offering. "Walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a *fragrant offering* and sacrifice to God" (Ephesians 5:2). Prayers of the saints are *incense*. ". . . golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints" (Revelation 5:8).
  - Practice *lectio divina* collectively using 1 John 1:1-10
  - End the session with each participant writing a journal entry including their thoughts about *lectio divina* and any other details about the session.

## Week 4

"Receive the Mind of Christ"

*Lectio Divina* Practiced Collectively—1 Corinthians 2:9-16

Home Assignment #2 for Individual *Lectio Divina*

- Read 1 Corinthians 2:16—Scripture about the mind of Christ
- Teach from book: *Habits of the Mind: Ten Exercises to Renew Your Thinking*, by Dr. Archibald Hart, a psychotherapist. He points out, "You are what you think."<sup>3</sup> He explains his understanding of the power of one's thoughts on his or her behavior:
- Thought always comes before feeling and action...If you want to influence how you feel or how you behave, you must first pay attention to how you think...Many unhappy people complain about their miserable feelings without

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<sup>3</sup>See Proverbs 23:7.

realizing that they can change those feelings through healthier thinking. It is our duty to know the mind of Christ, with His help, to emulate it.<sup>4</sup>

- Hart explains that taking “the time and trouble to seek the mind of Christ” is characteristic of “every great leader in the Christian realm.”<sup>5</sup> He points to chapter two of Philippians to define the “mind of Christ” that is sought by dedicated believers: (a) a loving mind (“having the same love”), v. 2; (b) a godly mind (“equal with God”), v. 6; (c) a servant’s mind (“the form of a servant”), v. 7; (d) a humble mind (“he humbled himself”), v. 8; (e) an obedient mind (“and become obedient unto death”), v. 8; (f) an exalted mind (“God also hath highly exalted him”), v. 9.<sup>6</sup>
- The implication is that because these great Christian leaders, who “steeped themselves in Scripture, studied it, and prayed about it until His Word was carved into their minds...directing their own stream of thought until there was simply nowhere else for it to go,”<sup>7</sup> allowed the Word to permeate their minds, their actions subsequently reflected the mind of Christ and significantly impacted the world around them. Hart holds that the same impact is possible today for believers who choose to renew their minds.<sup>8</sup>
- Practice *lectio divina* collectively using 1 Corinthians 2:9-16.
- End the session with each participant writing an entry into their journal with their thoughts about tonight’s lesson on the mind of Christ.

## Week 5

### “Flesh Verses Spirit”

*Lectio Divina* Practiced Collectively—Galatians 3:1-14

Home Assignment #3 for Individual *Lectio Divina*

- Read James 2:26, “For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.”
- Read Romans 8:6, “For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.”
- God gave us a way to change and transform, the Word and the Holy Spirit.<sup>9</sup> The Word of God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, is the link God chose for

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<sup>4</sup>Hart, 8.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 146.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 146-47.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>It is God’s will for everyone to live with “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23).

humans to be transformed into the likeness of Christ. Second Timothy 3:16-17 says, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” Reading, meditating, and praying the Word of God will enable us to be transformed so that we may accomplish all that God has purposed us to do.

- Second Corinthians 3:18 highlights the work of the Holy Spirit in our transformation: “We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being *transformed* into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” Reading the Word of God, while allowing the Holy Spirit to speak to us, reveals the true meditations of our minds and hearts. Hebrews 4:12 says, “For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” Allowing the Spirit to reveal whether our inward thoughts are aligned with the Scripture we are reading is foundational to our ability to be transformed into Christ-likeness.
- Once the Word uncovers any misalignments in our thinking or behavior, James warns us to “be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (James 1:22). We are to allow the Word to change us. Paul explained this to the Thessalonians, “...when you received the Word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the Word of God, which is at *work in you* believers” (1 Thess. 2:13).
- It is God’s will for everyone to live with “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23).
- Practice *lectio divina* collectively using Galatians 3:1-14.
- End the session with each participant writing a journal entry about their thoughts from the night’s session.

## **Week 6**

### “Made in the Image of God”

*Lectio Divina* Practiced Collectively—Genesis 1:26-31

Home Assignment #4 Individual *Lectio Divina*—Participants chose their own set of Scriptures to practice *lectio divina* pertaining to their area of struggle.

- Read Genesis 1:26-27, “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”
- Read Genesis 9:6, “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in His own image.”

- Read 2 Corinthians 3:18, “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the LORD, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the LORD who is the Spirit.”
- As God is the Lord over all of creation, humans reflect the image and likeness of God by ruling and exercising dominion over the rest of his creation, for its good, and for the welfare of others.<sup>10</sup> It is important to note God’s character in these passages of Scripture. It says, “God blessed them.” Since God *blessed* humans, humans reflect his likeness by being a *blessing* to others.
- Like the Old Testament, the New Testament attests to humans being made in God’s likeness and image and instructs them, in essence, to bless others by being an extension of God’s character to them. In James 3:9 the author condemns the use of the same tongue to praise God and then to curse humans who have been made in the likeness of God. This verse implies, therefore, that simply being made in the image of God does not necessitate godly behavior. Romans 8:29 notes that believers are being conformed to the image of the Son: “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.” Likewise, 2 Corinthians 3:18 says, “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” Both of these passages allude to the ongoing nature of being conformed to the character of God, which yields behavior more reflective of his nature.
- In Ephesians 4:23-24, Paul urges his readers “to be made new in the attitude of your minds and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.” Finally, Colossians 3:10 also refers to putting on “the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator,” suggesting that salvation does not simply enable a person to modify his or her behavior, but to actually become a new creation who is fully equipped to increasingly reflect the image and likeness of God.
- Participants practice *lectio divina* collectively using Genesis 1:26-31.
- End the session with the participants writing a journal entry with thoughts about tonight’s lesson.

## Week 7

### “Purpose to Meditate and Pray Scripture”

*Lectio Divina* Practiced Collectively— A participant chose the set of Scriptures for *lectio divina* and led the group.

Participant chosen Scriptures:

Group 1: Philippians 3:7-21

Group 2: 2 Corinthians 3:17-4:18

Group 3: Ephesians 5:8-14

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<sup>10</sup>Erickson, 528.

Home Assignment #5 Individual *Lectio Divina*—Participants chose their own set of Scriptures to practice *lectio divina* pertaining to their area of struggle.

- Teach that it is your lifestyle, or your actions, that are “the outer manifestation in the world of who you are, in your relationships with others and in your interactions with the events and circumstances of your life.”<sup>11</sup> We express our love for God by *doing* what those who love God should *do*.<sup>12</sup> Then our *being* overflows to our *doing*.<sup>13</sup> As our *being* conforms to the image of Christ that is described in the Word of God, our *doing* also changes.
- Jesus’ Great Commandment puts being and doing in their true relationship. Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was, and he said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30, RSV). Jesus is giving us several different insights here, all of which have to do with the relationship between being and doing.<sup>14</sup>
- Philippians 4:8 instructs believers to focus their thoughts on “...whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever lovely, whatever is admirable” and “if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—*think* about such things.” Certainly, that which is perfectly “true”, “noble”, “right”, “pure”, “lovely”, and “admirable” is the Word of God, Christ Himself. The practice of *thinking* on the Word should be primary in the life of the believer and should precede the expectation of behavioral transformation.
- The Scriptural command to “be transformed by the renewing of your mind” is not merely a spiritual process, but a physiological one as well. Recent studies in neuroscience have offered evidence that supports that the brain physically changes when it is engaged in the exercise of meditating. In *Real Happiness: The Power of Meditation*, Sharon Salzberg attests that the human brain is a learning machine that translates what is focused on (thoughts) into correlating outcomes. Salzberg links physical and emotional well-being to meditative practices, which have the capability to affect brain function and structure by changing it. These changes may affect physical and emotional health for the better, or worse, depending on what is meditated upon.<sup>15</sup>
- In terms of impact on physical and emotional health, whether or not what is meditated upon is objectively true is not the primary issue. Salzberg asserts that while one’s starting thought may be an objective truth, the tendency is to alter

<sup>11</sup>Mulholland, 98.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 100.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 95-97.

<sup>15</sup>Salzberg, 28, 78.

that truth by imposing various “add-ons” that influence one’s perception, and therefore, influence the focus of one’s meditation on that experiential truth. Salzberg encourages the practice of “mindfulness” as a means of ensuring that these “add-ons” do not contribute to thoughts, emotions, and behaviors that are inconsistent with the objective truth<sup>16</sup>:

- Mindfulness, also called wise attention, helps us see what we’re adding to our experiences, not only during meditation sessions but also elsewhere. These add-ons might take the form of projecting into the future (*my neck hurts, so I’ll be miserable forever*), foregone conclusions (*there’s no point in asking for a raise*), rigid concepts (*you’re either for me or against me*), unexamined habits (you feel tense and reach for a cookie) or associative thinking (you snap at your daughter and then leap to your own childhood problems and then on to deciding you’re just like your mom)...we want to see clearly what we’re doing as we’re doing it, to be able to distinguish our direct experience from the add-ons, and to know that we can choose whether to heed them or not.<sup>17</sup>
- Believers certainly are not immune to “adding on” to the objective truth of Scripture, which inhibits their transformation. Being aware of these potential “add-ons,” and choosing to disregard them when they are ill-informed, is vital for a believer to experience a renewed mind. The believer must know, however, that their transformation is not solely dependent on their own efforts, but also through their reliance on the Holy Spirit to transform them from the inside out.
- Meditating on the objective truth of Scripture, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, transforms the mind of the believer by aligning his or her “stories” to the truth of who God is, how He relates to his people, and how He desires his people to relate to one another. The nature of these “stories,” according to Lisa Wimberger in *New Beliefs, New Brain*, changes the makeup of the brain:
- Our experience acts as the catalyst for the brain’s ability to change...Science has discovered that the experience need not be anything more than a perception, story, or belief. When the prefrontal cortex perceives it’s in control based on the story we’re telling it—those stories begin to sculpt our mind-scape. The stories one creates subconsciously imbue those stories with details and emotional content, they become marked in our brains by dedicated neural pathways and networks...<sup>18</sup>
- These neural pathways and networks are not only created by the “stories” one repeats (interpretation of one’s experience), but they are also determinative of future thought patterns and perceptions, which lead to correlating behavior. For the believer, the importance of interpreting experiences based on objective Scriptural truth is clear. Current thinking that is aligned with the truth of Scripture leads to future thinking that is aligned with Scripture, which leads to transformed, Christ-like behavior.

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<sup>16</sup>Salzberg, 28.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 78-79.

<sup>18</sup>Wimberger, 33.

- Practice *lectio divina* collectively. Each group used a different set of Scriptures. Each group's Scriptures are listed above.
- End the session with the participants writing a journal entry that includes their thoughts about this lesson.

## Week 8

"Peace and Transformation—Isaiah 26:3-9"

*Lectio Divina* Practiced Collectively—A participant chose the set of Scriptures for *lectio divina* and led the group

Participant Post-Test

Participant chosen Scriptures:

Group 1: Luke 18:1-8

Group 2: Matthew 6:5-8

Group 3: Luke 11:5-13

- Read Isaiah 26:3, "You keep him in perfect peace whose *mind is stayed on you*, because he trusts in you."
- In Isaiah 26:3, the prophet urges the people to change their minds from trusting in anything other than God. This verse exhorts everyone to cast themselves solely upon God because it is only by trusting in Him that they would experience "perfect peace." Isaiah's call to keep their minds stayed on Him (or to renew their minds) in order to find peace, which comes from depending solely on God, reflects his understanding that the focus of their minds expresses their attitude and direction for their lives.
- This beautifully expressed assurance of peace gives confidence that God will guard those who remain loyal to him so that they may be certain of a place in the final triumph, but also recognizes that "God preserves those who look forward to this time so that they may be assured of reaching it."<sup>19</sup> In His preservation, God promises to renew the minds of those who choose to depend on Him, instead of on themselves, so that they may live according to His will.
- Each group practiced *lectio divina* collectively using a different set of Scriptures. Those Scriptures are listed above.
- The participants were given a post-test survey to elicit whether or not practicing *lectio divina* aided in a change in their area of struggle.
- Every participant wrote a final journal entry to express their thoughts and ideas about *lectio divina* and what participating in this project meant to them.

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<sup>19</sup>Clements, 212.

**Post-Meeting**      One-on-one participant exit interview

- After the final session, each participant engaged in a one-on-one exit interview. Each participant met with me privately and personally.

**APPENDIX C**  
**ENTRANCE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

## ENTRANCE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Would you like to have a deeper more intimate relationship with God? Explain.
2. Would you like to improve your thoughts or change aspects of your thought life? Explain.
3. How often do you pray?
4. When you read the Word of God, do you **always, sometimes, or never** gain insight? Explain.
5. Approximately how much time do you spend reading Scripture per week?
6. Would you like to gain more insight or understanding when you read Scripture? Explain.
7. How often do you pray verses from Scripture?
8. Do you have any weakness or behavior(s) that you think need to be conquered or corrected?
9. What is your biggest struggle or weakness?
10. Where do you think your weaknesses begin?
11. What do you think are barriers to changing your weakness or behavior(s)?
12. What are your biggest mental struggles?
13. Do you struggle with any negative thoughts? Explain.
14. Do you have a plan to actively change or conquer any existing thoughts, weaknesses, or behavior(s)? Explain.
15. Do you have a spiritual discipline that you practice on a regular basis?

**APPENDIX D**  
**EXIT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

**EXIT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. What is *lectio divina*?
2. What is one area of struggle you have focused on to change over the past eight weeks?
3. Has practicing *lectio divina* with a set of Scriptures helped you improve in this area of struggle? If yes, please give an explanation?
4. Have your thoughts improved over the last eight weeks to be more in alignment with Scripture? How?
5. If you have experienced a change in your thoughts and/or behaviors over the past eight weeks, at what percentage rate would you say you have changed? (E.g. 100%, 90%, 80%, 70%, etc.)
6. Did Scripture help change your mind over the past eight weeks? If so, how?
7. In the future, do you think you will practice *lectio divina*? Why, or why not?
8. What has participating in this project meant to you?

**APPENDIX E**  
**PRE-TEST SURVEY**

## PARTICIPANT PRE-TEST SURVEY

Eight participants engaged in a pre-test survey. The following lists ten questions the participants were asked, a scale for interpreting the analysis, and a report with the outcome.

Each question is worth 12.5 points.

SA=Strongly Agree

A=Agree

N=Neutral/Undecided/Unknown

D=Disagree

SD=Strongly Disagree

1. I have at least one area of weakness that I struggle with. (Note: This may be a weakness in thoughts and/or behaviors.) \_\_\_\_\_

2. I regularly meditate on Scripture. \_\_\_\_\_

3. I believe Scripture is one of the key components to change me.

\_\_\_\_\_

4. I have a set of Scriptures to meditate on daily that pertains to at least one area where I struggle. \_\_\_\_\_

5. I engage my five senses when I read Scripture. \_\_\_\_\_

6. When I read Scripture, I remember it and reflect upon it throughout the day.

\_\_\_\_\_

7. I practice a spiritual discipline on a regular basis. \_\_\_\_\_

8. I have heard of the spiritual practice of *lectio divina*. \_\_\_\_\_

9. I practice *lectio divina* on a regular basis. \_\_\_\_\_

10. I experience difficulty in my thoughts. \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX F**  
**PRE-TEST SURVEY RESULTS**

**PRE-TEST SURVEY RESULTS**

	SA	A	N	D	SD
1.	75%	25%	0%	0%	0%
2.	25%	50%	0%	25%	0%
3.	12.5%	87.5%	0%	0%	0%
4.	0%	12.5%	0%	87.5%	0%
5.	0%	12.5%	25%	12.5%	50%
6.	37.5%	37.5%	0%	25%	0%
7.	0%	12.5%	0%	12.5%	75%
8.	0%	0%	0%	12.5%	87.5%
9.	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
10.	62.5%	25%	0%	12.5%	0%

**APPENDIX G**  
**POST-TEST SURVEY**

**PARTICIPANT POST-TEST SURVEY**

Eight participants engaged in a post-test survey. The following lists ten questions the participants were asked, a scale for interpreting the analysis, and a report with the outcome.

Each question is worth 12.5 points.

SA=Strongly Agree

A=Agree

N=Neutral/Undecided/Unknown

D=Disagree

SD=Strongly Disagree

1. I have at least one area of weakness that I struggle with. (Note: This may be a weakness in thoughts and/or behaviors.) \_\_\_\_\_

2. I regularly meditate on Scripture. \_\_\_\_\_

3. I believe Scripture is one of the key components to change me.

\_\_\_\_\_

4. I have a set of Scriptures to meditate on daily that pertains to at least one area where I struggle. \_\_\_\_\_

5. I engage my five senses when I read Scripture. \_\_\_\_\_

6. When I read Scripture, I remember it and reflect upon it throughout the day.

\_\_\_\_\_

7. I practice a spiritual discipline on a regular basis. \_\_\_\_\_

8. I have heard of the spiritual practice of *lectio divina*. \_\_\_\_\_

9. I practice *lectio divina* on a regular basis. \_\_\_\_\_
10. I experience difficulty in my thoughts. \_\_\_\_\_
11. I have at least one area of struggle that has changed and improved as a result of practicing *lectio divina*. \_\_\_\_\_
12. *Lectio divina* helps me remember Scriptures. \_\_\_\_\_
13. During the eight weeks I have participated in this study, my thoughts and behaviors have improved and changed to be more in alignment with Scripture.  
\_\_\_\_\_
14. *Lectio divina* has given me a way to engage in Scripture and encounter God on a deeper level. \_\_\_\_\_
15. After this project, I will practice *lectio divina*. \_\_\_\_\_.

**APPENDIX H**  
**POST-TEST SURVEY RESULTS**

**POST-TEST SURVEY RESULTS**

	SA	A	N	D	SD
1.	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
2.	62.5%	37.5%	0%	0%	0%
3.	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
4.	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
5.	50%	25%	12.5%	12.5%	0%
6.	75%	25%	0%	0%	0%
7.	62.5%	37.5%	0%	0%	0%
8.	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
9.	50%	37.5%	12.5%	0%	0%
10.	0%	25%	0%	75%	0%
11.	87.5%	12.5%	0%	0%	0%
12.	50%	37.5%	12.5%	0%	0%
13.	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
14.	87.5%	12.5%	0%	0%	0%
15.	50%	25%	12.5%	12.5%	0%

## **APPENDIX I**

### ***LECTIO DIVINA HANDOUT***

### The Practice of *Lectio Divina*

*Lectio divina* is generally comprised of four movements—*lectio* (read), *meditatio* (meditate), *oratio* (pray), and *contemplatio* (contemplate):

1. *Lectio / Read*—A passage of Scripture is read out loud. After reading Scripture out loud, engage the intellect and reflect upon the verses for one to three minutes. Look at the context of the passage of Scripture being reflected upon and look for the *literal* sense. Ask the questions: who, what, where, why, and when did this take place. It is helpful to use a study Bible to look at notes or a commentary to help enlighten the participant. Deciding the genre of the passage is also beneficial. For instance, is it a parable (a story to illustrate a point), a historical narrative (a real-life event), or a poem.
2. *Meditatio / Meditate*—Read the Scripture out loud for the second time. For one to three minutes the meaning of the Scripture is reflected upon with an active mind. This involves engaging the heart and asking the questions, “What and how does this passage of Scripture relate to me personally?” and also, using the imagination to place oneself into the text. This involves allowing personal experiences, memories, thoughts, feelings, hopes, and desires to be integrated as the passage is reflected upon. This allows for the *spiritual* sense of the Scripture to be engaged.
3. *Oratio / Pray*—Read the Scripture out loud for the third time. Respond to the passage of Scripture by opening the heart more deeply and asking the Lord to help apply this truth to his or her life. This is taking time to pray the word.

The prayer may include petitioning God for whatever the heart desires, contrition, asking for forgiveness, asking for healing, expressing help to relieve pain, hurt, anger, and, frustration, or, perhaps engaging in a time of praise—appreciation of, gratitude for, and adoration of God. Prayer time is the human response to the passage of Scripture being reflected upon.

4. *Contemplatio / Contemplate*—Read the Scripture out loud for the fourth time.

Rest in the Lord. Allow God time to speak. This means being quiet and receiving from God. This is allowing God time to speak to the heart of the participant. After engaging in *lectio divina* the participant is to allow the passage of Scripture meditated upon to interact with his or her life and to respond to it by changing behaviors. Meditation on Scripture will allow participants to remember it and reflect upon it throughout the day, weeks, months, or years to come.

## **APPENDIX J**

### ***LECTIO DIVINA- USING THE FIVE SENSES***

**Lectio Divina-Using the Five Senses**

*Lectio divina* engages the five senses to obtain optimal learning of Scripture.

Tests and research has proven that the more senses used during learning the more of what is being learned remains.

1. *See* Scripture—Sight is used to read Scripture.
2. *Touch* Scripture—Follow along the verses by pointing with your index finger.
3. *Hear* Scripture—Read Scripture out loud.
4. *Taste* Scripture—“How sweet are your words to my *taste*, sweeter than honey to my mouth” (Psalm 119:103). “Your words were found, and *I ate them*, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name, O LORD, God of hosts” (Jeremiah 15:16). “Oh, *taste* and see that the LORD is good; How blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him” (Psalm 34:8).
5. *Smell* Scripture—Smell in a spiritual sense. Scripture denotes, “Thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the *fragrance* of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the *aroma* of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God’s word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ” (2 Corinthians 2:14-17). The smoke of Noah’s sacrifice is called *sweet*. “Then Noah built an

altar to the LORD and took some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And when the LORD *smelled* the pleasing aroma, the LORD said in his heart, ‘I will never again curse the ground because of man. . .’ (Genesis 8:20-21). The Levitical burnt offering is said to be “. . . a pleasing *aroma* . . . to the LORD” (Exodus 29:18). Christ’s love for us is a *fragrant* offering. “Walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a *fragrant offering* and sacrifice to God” (Ephesians 5:2). Prayers of the saints are *incense*. “. . . golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints” (Revelation 5:8).

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